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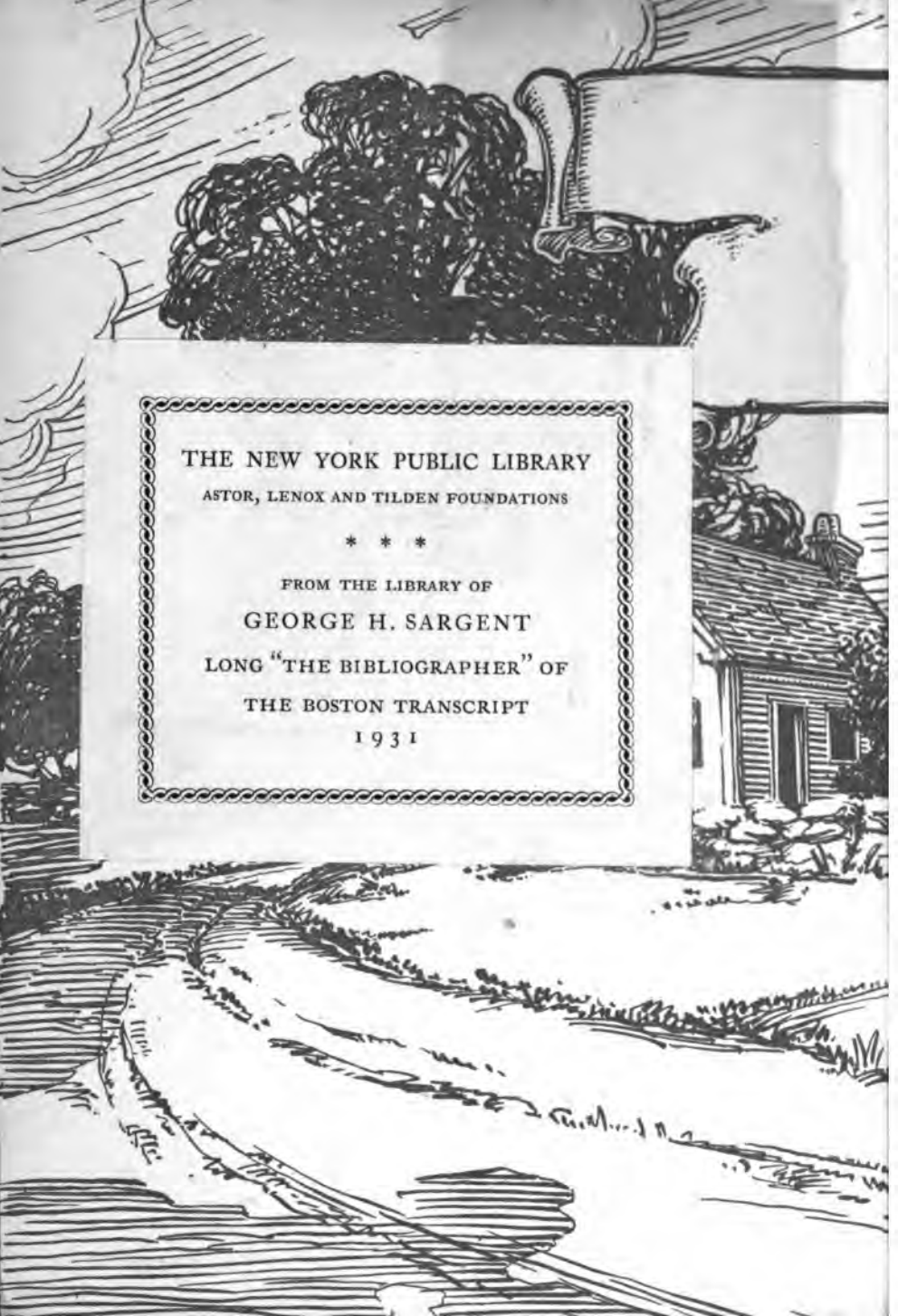
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THE
HILLS O' HAMPSHIRE

BY

WILL M. CRESSY AND
JAMES CLARENCE HARVEY



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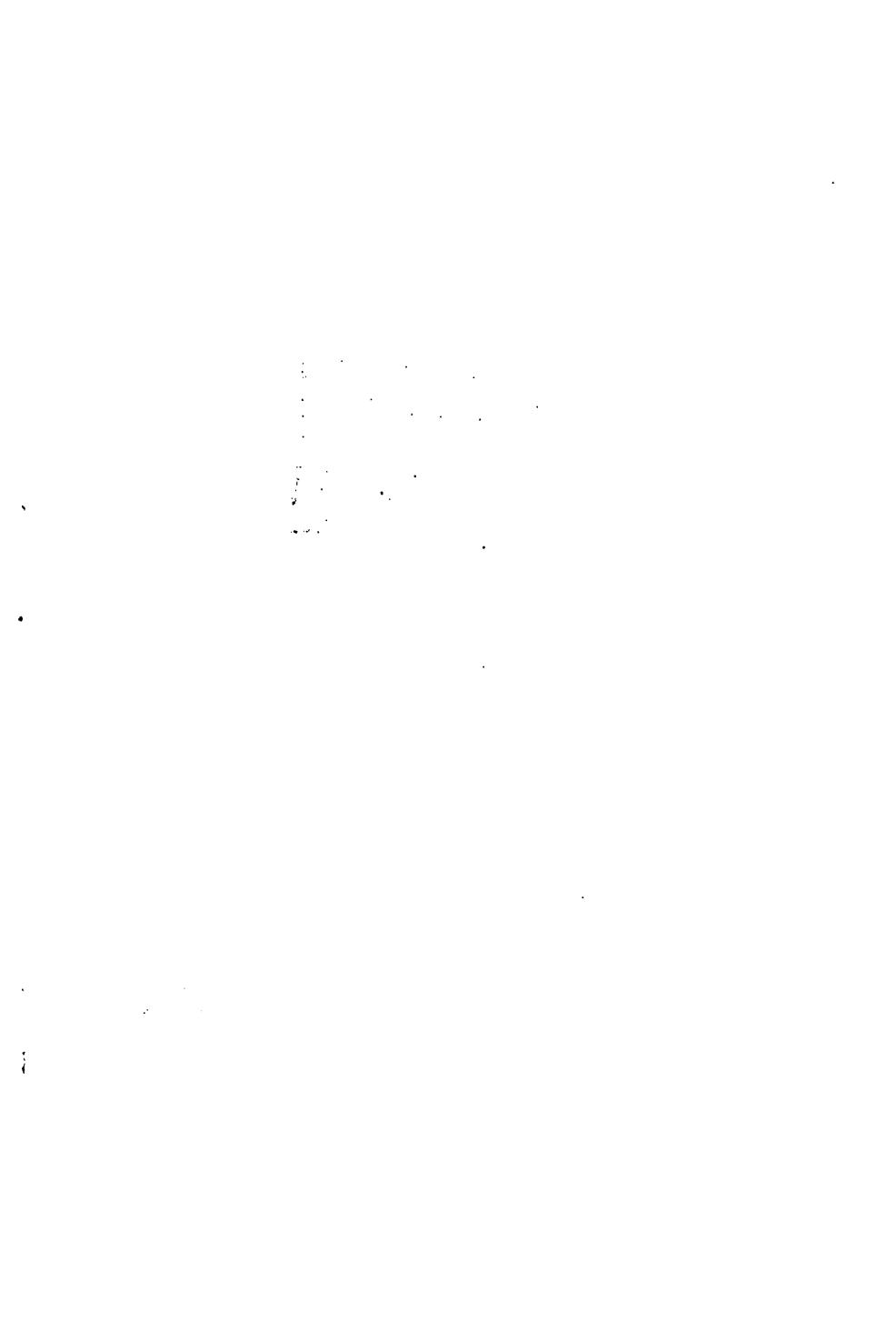
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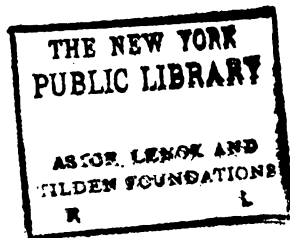


Dup. to
be kept

NBC

**THE
HILLS O' HAMPSHIRE**





To
GEORGE SARGENT
WITH REGARDS.

Wm D. Sargent

Dup. to
Be Kept



"Now have I mislaid that baby again?" he asked, helplessly.

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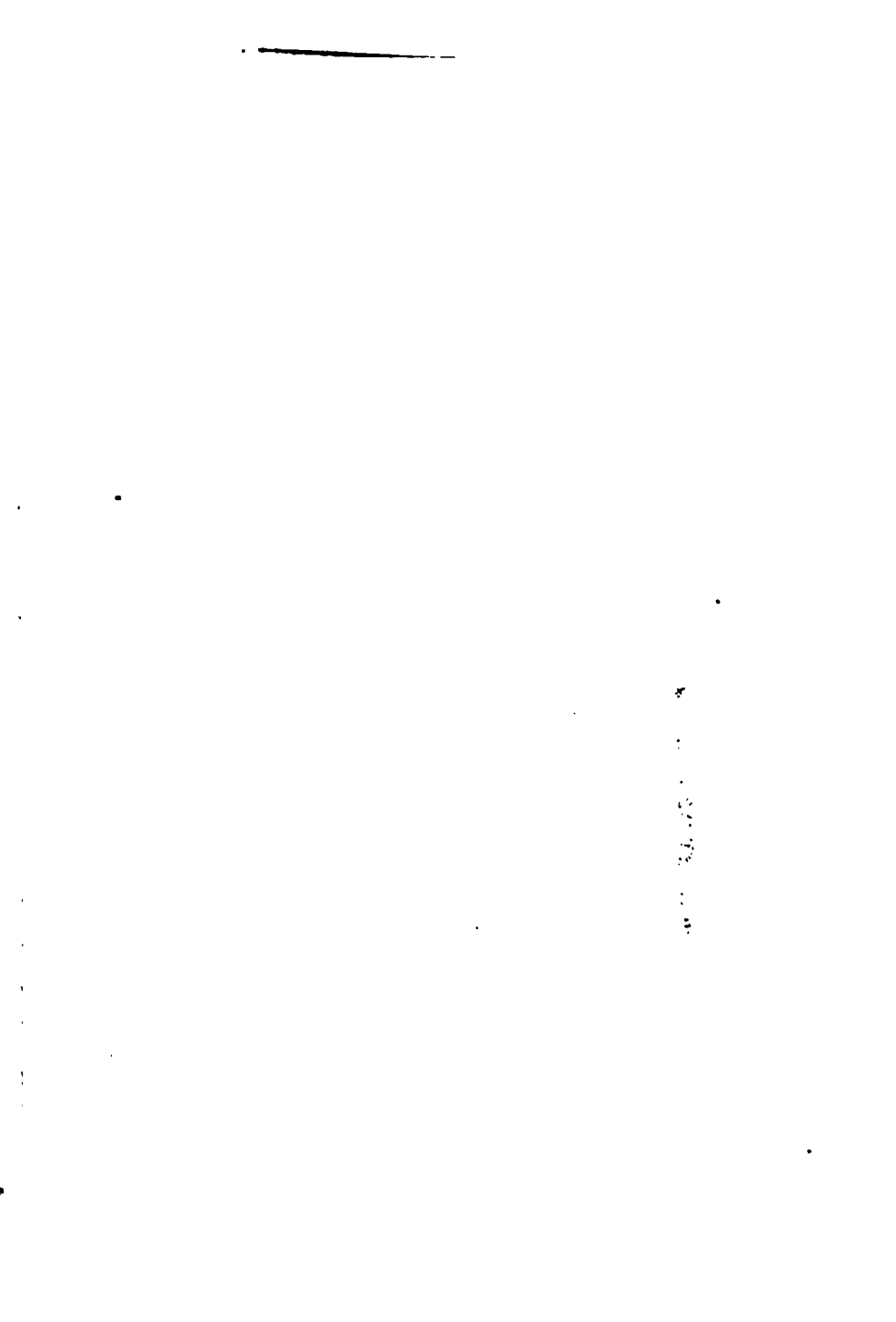
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THE HILLS O' HAMPSHIRE

BY
WILL M. CRESSY
AND
JAMES CLARENCE HARVEY

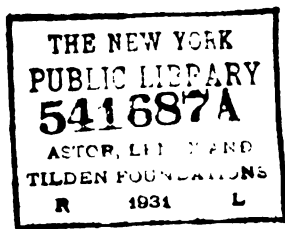
Rock-ribbed New England, mother of the West,
What stories ye could tell, of by-gone days!
What sturdy sires lie deep within your breast:
Their brows uncrowned with laurel or with bays!

Colored Frontispiece by
J. W. F. KENNEDY



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WOMAN
CLUB
HALL

TO
THE LEGAL FRATERNITY
OF
THE UNITED STATES
THE MAJORITY OF WHICH SEEMS TO PLACE
THE LETTER OF THE LAW
ABOVE THE SPIRIT
IS DEDICATED
THIS CHARACTERIZATION OF A MAN
WHO HELD
THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW
HIGHER THAN
THE LETTER

Hearman / 5 May 1931

THE HILLS O' HAMPSHIRE

CHAPTER I

TWENTY-FIVE years ago, Bradford, New Hampshire, was, as it is to-day, one of the prettiest villages in all New England.

The principal homes are on the one, long, wide street, where the great elms and maples form an arch overhead, as though to kiss, with lips of leaves, in the verdant Spring, or to shake their bare arms angrily in the stern severity of Winter.

The large, old-fashioned houses are set well back from the street, each surrounded by well-tended flower beds, syringas and sunflower hedges. Most of the houses were painted white, but green blinds relieved the monotony, the taste of the owner being in evidence, in his selection of what he considered really the proper green. White picket fences surrounded them and, all in all, it was perhaps the most typical New England village in the Hills o' Hampshire.

Its industries were limited to the grist mill, the saw mill, the harness shop and the cobbler's bench.

Its public buildings were the Town Hall, the Baptist Church and the law office of Squire Tappan. The railway ran athwart the village and the depot was the social center of the town. Here, at nine in the morning, men and boys gathered to see the "down train" come and go, on its way to Concord and Boston. At six o'clock, in the afternoon, the "up train" was received by practically the entire population, male and female. The men said they came to get the evening papers. The girls, in "second best," came to see the boys. The boys came to see the girls and the mothers came to keep an eye on the girls.

While the depot was, during the summer, the Mecca of the *élite*, the real business center of the town, the place where all matters of state, finance, religion and politics were settled, was the law office of Squire Tappan.

In the smaller villages, among the hills o' Hampshire, the modern office building is as yet unknown. The lawyer, the doctor and the minister have, usually, a little building in the corner of the yard which serves as office, laboratory or study.

In one of these little buildings, the Selectmen, of which the Squire had been Chairman for twenty years, met, on the second Tuesday of each month, to transact business connected with the government of the village. Here all appropriations were made

and all monies paid out. Here the tax list was settled and school teachers examined and engaged.

Squire William Tappan was one of those New England institutions that is fast passing away — The Village Lawyer.

For forty years he had practiced, or, as he expressed it, experimented, law, in the little village. He shared or carried the burdens, secrets and troubles of the entire township, to say nothing of the surrounding territory.

The Squire was undoubtedly the most influential man in the county. He was also one of the poorest. He usually had the poor man's end of everything, getting nothing if he won, and charging nothing if he lost. Even if he had, the first comer with a pitiful tale could have taken all with the Squire's blessing.

He was tall, with waving, white hair, usually a month overdue at the barber's. A little tuft of white hair adorned his chin. Kindly blue eyes twinkled with laughter or snapped with anger. Summer and winter, he wore a blue coat with brass buttons, a flowered silk waistcoat and the first pair of trousers that came to his hand in the morning. He was a quaint, dry, philosophical old fellow, with very limited knowledge of the laws of man, but unlimited insight into human nature. Shrewd, common sense and judgment were his, and his com-

mon sense carried him through many a hard place, where his knowledge of the law was at fault.

He admitted the possession of two vices, the first, an inordinate passion for smoking. He was seldom seen without the half burned end of a cigar, or "*see-gar*," as he called it, between his lips. It was seldom lit, for, as he expressed it, "I allus notice they last longer if you don't light 'em."

The second vice was his life-long desire to own a clarinet, a longing that was still, in his sixty-second year, unsatisfied.

Betsy, the youngest of sixteen children, his sister, was still with him. She had married previous to the outbreak of the Civil War, a man of more patriotism than means, and had been left one of the thousands of "war widows," with a pension of four dollars a month to support herself and two baby boys, heirs to an estate that did not exist. All the other children had gone away or been laid away, at the Squire's expense.

The Squire's father before him had been a lawyer, and at his death "the old place" had been left to the Squire. The "place" consisted of the old homestead, standing about midway of the village, the little law office, a big barn and about thirty acres of rich farm land, back on the meadows.

Here, upon the death of "Private Benjamin Stanley Gould" the Squire had brought Betsy and

the two boys, Benjamin, Junior, and William Tappan Gould. And here the two boys had grown to manhood, attended the village school and listened to the Squire's philosophy.

William, or Will, as he was generally called, was going to do something big. He had plans and schemes enough to keep a dozen boys busy, but somehow, they never matured. He had started on a dozen different roads to fame and fortune, but somehow, before he was far on one road, he started on another.

Ben, the younger, was of different fiber. He was slow, without Will's lofty ambitions. He aimed low, but generally hit the mark. In school, Will would be at the top of one class, and at the foot of the others. Ben was about number three in all. Since leaving school, two years before, Will had worked for every man in town, about one week for each. Ben had gone to work in the grist mill and was still working there.

The parting of the ways had come for the two boys. They were going away from the little village, to begin their struggle with the world in earnest. Ben was to enter the office of Gordon & Osborn, Architects, New York. John Osborn, the junior partner, had, in his younger days, tried his hand at teaching school, and the Squire had been his principal, or rather, only support during a very

worry." Will kissed her hurriedly, and carelessly said, "Well, so long, mother."

The trunks were put on the train. "All aboard!" shouted the conductor and the train was off, carrying the boys on their way to fame and fortune.

The villagers plodded home. The Squire put his arm around Betsy and led her up the shaded street to the homestead. "Well, Betsy," he said, after they had gone a little way, "we've launched 'em. Now we'll see what kind of a cargo they'll bring home."

CHAPTER II

THE days seemed long to the Squire and Betsy after the boys were gone. The old house was quieter. There was not so much "picking up" to do and Betsy lacked sufficient occupation. She missed the muddy foot-prints on the floor and the opportunity to scold about them. The two little bedrooms up-stairs looked so orderly and neat every morning, when she looked in, it made her heart ache. Her cooking had shrunk to such minute proportions, it was impossible to provide economically. The bread was hard and dry before they could eat it. A pie lasted a week.

She developed a hitherto unknown habit of "visitin'." When she could no longer stand the loneliness of the old house, she would take her knitting and go calling.

The Squire took up work that had been waiting his attention for months. His office became a model for neatness. He wandered around the house and grounds like a lost soul and smoked far more than was good for him.

When the children came home from school, during the days of autumn, he would gaze after them

with a longing in his heart that he was careful to conceal from Betsy.

One afternoon as he sat at the door of his office he heard the sound of wheels, and turning saw Silas Dalby driving up the road.

Silas Dalby was the richest man in town. In fact, he was the only rich man in town. He was the only man that could get rich. In these small towns where there is no manufacturing, all the buying and selling is done by the keeper of the store. The farmer, the producer and the consumer, never see much real money. When his crops are harvested, the storekeeper buys them, and buys them at a price which promises a profit. This is profit number one. Then, instead of handing out the cash in payment, he gives credit on his books. Interest on this capital becomes profit number two. Then, when the producer becomes consumer, and needs something from the store, the storekeeper sells it to him at another profit. On the first of the year, the account is balanced, merely to find out how much the farmer still owes the storekeeper.

So, while the farmer is the most independent man on earth, and can have, practically, anything he wants, the village storekeeper is the one who utilizes the real money.

Some people called Silas hard, but no man had

ever breathed a word against his integrity. If Silas owed a dollar on the first day of the month, no one ever had to wait until the second for payment. He was equally punctilious about collections. He was tall, slim, and colorless. He invariably wore a dust-colored suit of clothes, a gray, flannel shirt and a gray, soft hat. He had gray hair, gray eyes, and even his skin was a grayish yellow. A thin fringe of hair went round under his chin, also gray.

Silas drove up to the gate, stopped and called: "Hello, Squire!" then tied the old horse with many a hitch. The horse was nearly as old as Silas himself. Silas had bought him when he was a frisky young colt and could never get over the idea that he was still a giddy, irresponsible young thing, to be watched carefully and handled watchfully.

The Squire responded, watching Silas with an amused smile, as he anchored the decrepit, old horse and then came in through the gate.

The Squire noticed a little girl of about twelve or fourteen, sitting in the wagon.

"Well," said Silas, "I see you are working as hard as usual."

"Ye-us," the Squire admitted, "my principal occupation lately is in the mornin' when I wish it was night, an' at night when I wish it was mornin'. The trouble is, I can't find anything to do."

"Well," said Silas, "I kin keep ye busy fer a minute or two, I guess."

"Good!" said the Squire, tipping his chair down, and brightening up. "What is it?"

"Well," said Silas, "ye see the little girl in the wagon there?"

The Squire turned and looked more closely at the child in the wagon.

"Yes," he said, "who is she?"

"Well," said Silas, "she's legal business."

The small bundle in the wagon sat up indignantly.

"Why, I ain't, nuther!"

"Tut, tut, tut!" Silas exclaimed, reprovingly. "You mustn't dispute."

"Well, then, you mustn't lie," the small person replied.

Silas rose and stepped toward the wagon, speaking pityingly to her.

"Why, ye poor, benighted female, you —"

In an instant the small person was on her feet in the wagon, with the whip in her hand, which she shook viciously at Silas.

"Say, by Gosh, you're an old feller an' I hate to tech ye," said she, "but you call me another uv them names, an' I'll skin ye!"

"Why, I ain't a callin' ye names," said Silas in dismay, "I jest said ye was legal bizness, an' ye be."

"Well, I d'know whether I be or not," returned the small lady, doubtfully.

Silas, who had reached the limit of his ability to deal with the matter, turned and looked at the Squire appealingly. The Squire slowly rose and walked to the wagon, to take a closer look at the legal business. He found her a mite of a girl, about twelve years of age, dressed in neat but patched clothing under an old jacket which was much too big for her. From beneath her old, knit hood peeped forth a round face, with big, questioning brown eyes. Her left hand clutched an old carpet bag.

The Squire stepped nearer and leaned against the front wheel.

"There, there! They ain't nobody goin' to hurt ye," he said.

"No, I know there ain't, while this whip holds out," replied the small person, testily.

The Squire turned to Silas, who had cautiously taken his stand just out of reach of the whip.

"Silas, what is this all about?"

He helped the child from the wagon, the old carpet bag still gripped firmly in her wee hands. He led her to the office steps and patted her cheek tenderly.

"Set down, there," he said kindly. "Set down and stop gettin' all het up an' excited. Set down

and rest ye, while we talk it over; ” then turning to Silas, he repeated: “ What is it about? ”

“ You remember ole Nate Thompson, over to the Center, don't ye, William? ” asked Silas.

“ Ye-us. Ye-us. Owed me two dollars when he died.”

“ Humph,” grunted Silas, “ I don't see anything novel in that. Everybody in town owes ye, don't they? ”

“ Pooty nigh, I guess,” said the Squire with a laugh.

“ Well, you remember Nate had a daughter, Mary, don't ye? ” continued Silas.

“ Ye-up.”

“ Well, this,” pointing to the small person on the doorstep, “ is her gal. Mary went up to Vermont, somewhere, and married a feller, kind of a shiftless, no-account — ”

“ Say, what's the matter with you? ” the Squire cut in indignantly, glancing over toward the child.

“ Oh, all right then,” snapped Silas, “ he was a bright and shinin' light,” adding in a lower tone, “ but he went out.”

Silas took a legal-looking paper from his hat; looked into it, and continued. “ His name was Needham — James V. Needham — and here about four years ago he got to be such a shinin' light that he was requested by a committee of citizens to help

purify the town by getting out of it; and he did. And he's been purifying it ever since, I guess, for nobody's ever heard hide nor hair of him.

"A month ago the mother, Mary Thompson, as was, took sick and died, and left this young 'un all alone. Nobody knew where the father come from, and, knowing the mother came from here, they have sent her for this town to take care of."

The Squire looked over at the small person, and, gazing intently at her, asked:

"U-m-m-m-m. An' what was ye calculatin' to do with her, Silas?"

"Why, there ain't but one thing to do with her, 's I see," said Silas. "I've got her commitment papers all made out fer her to be committed to the Poor Farm. All they need is your signature as Fu'st Selectman of the town, and then I'll drive over there and leave her."

"Oh, yes!" muttered the Squire. "Oh, yes!" The Squire sat looking at the child with eyes that saw not. For Silas' words had brought back memories of bygone years, years when the old house, so quiet now, had rung with the voices of two little boys, years when the first thought in the morning was how to insert some faint glimmering of the lessons to be learned into two small heads, so full of mischief that there was scarcely room for the meaningless details of lessons.

In those days, the six hours of school seemed longer to him than the other eighteen hours of the whole day. The long, winter evenings were filled with stories of Grandpa Tappan's Indian fights in "The Chattagee Woods," and they had sent two small boys to bed in fearful and delicious terror.

Those were the years when the yard, barn, and even the Squire's office rang with the shrill whoops of contending tribes, as the oft-told battles were refought by the boys.

And then his thoughts jumped ahead to the future, when through the big house should sound only the steps of Betsy and himself, growing slower year by year; years when the grass should slowly overcome and obliterate the path which led from the house to the barn, and to the little office; years when there would be no children to love, to care for, to worry over.

Then, slowly, his thoughts came back to the present, to Silas, sitting there with the commitment papers, waiting only his signature to send this little one to the poor, bare, sickening Poor Farm. He could only see the pitiful, forlorn little figure sitting there on his steps, trying so hard to keep back the tears, and look defiantly at Fate.

And while he sat there, looking at this little figure, a deep and cunning plot began to form in the depths of his soul. A plot that had for its victim

— Betsy; Betsy, that loving sister, whom he had watched over and guarded for so many years. But he needed time to complete his plans; he must dissemble.

He turned to Silas, sat back, crossed his legs and smiled, with a smile of deep deception.

“Silas — how would a glass of cider strike ye?”

“Well,” said Silas, “I don’t mind.”

“No. I thought ye wouldn’t. Ye see, this legal bizness is very dry work.” He then turned and called over to the house, “Betsy! Oh, Betsy!”

There was a brief pause. The door of the kitchen opened and Betsy appeared. “Well, what is it?” she asked.

“Don’t you want to draw Silas a pitcher of cider, Betsy?” asked the Squire.

“Course I do!” said Betsy, promptly. “I don’t know of a thing on earth that will give me so much pleasure as it will to tend bar fer you and Silas Dalby. I hain’t got nothin’ else to do, ye know, but to wait on a passel uv men folks.”

The small person on the steps sat motionless, but the big brown eyes looked searchingly from Betsy to Silas and then at the Squire.

The Squire paid no attention to the note of impatience in Betsy’s voice, but replied good naturedly, “I thought ye would. You go ahead in, Silas, and she’ll fix ye.”

Silas rose. "Well, thank ye. Don't care if I do."

"I don't care if ye do, nuther," replied the Squire. "But here, let me see them papers while you're gone."

Silas handed him the commitment papers and stepped into the house. The Squire turned back to the small person, who immediately shifted her gaze to the ground and began drawing complicated designs in the sand with the toe of her shoe.

As the Squire looked at her, a kindly smile gradually spread over his face. "Well," said he, at last, "what have you got to say about this?" There was no answer.

"Hain't ye got nothin' to say about it?" There was a slight shake of the head.

"What do ye think of this idee of goin' over to the Poor Farm to live? Do ye like it?"

The little head shook sadly and the lower lip began to quiver again. The Squire spoke hastily. "Well, well, now, you come over here and tell me all about it."

The forlorn, little figure arose, carefully deposited the old carpet bag on the step, and came slowly to the side of his chair. The Squire, with his shrewd, old eyes, took in everything about the child. He saw the neat, little, plaid dress, the

stout, little shoes so sadly worn. He noticed a patch, sewed neatly at the elbow of the old jacket; he noticed the close, even stitches, put in by the mother who had been called away. He noticed another little rip in the seam of the sleeve, drawn together by straggling, uneven stitches, where the childish fingers had tried to follow the lessons in neatness taught by the mother.

The Squire took the little hand in his. "Now come on. Tell me all about it. Tell me when and where you was born — and why."

But the lips trembled too much to be trusted to speak as yet.

"What is your name?" asked the Squire.

The little girl swallowed the lump in her throat, winked her eyes and replied: "Nannie. Nannie Needham."

"Well, now, that's a nice name," said the Squire. "And you don't look like a bad, little girl."

"Well, I ain't bad, nacherly," the little one replied, "but Gosh blame it! Everybody keeps a-pickin' on me, since my mamma died. They keep twittin' me about my father bein' a bad egg, an' sayin' what wuz bred in the bone will come out in the flesh. Why, Lordy, I wa'n't to blame 'cause my father wuz a crooked stick, wuz I?"

"No, no," the Squire answered hastily. "An' folks hadn't ought to talk to ye that way. I knew

your mother fust rate when she wuz a little gal like you, an' she wuz an awful good little gal."

"Why! Wuz my mother a little girl, like me, onct?" The little face brightened up.

"Yes, indeed," answered the Squire. "She used to play round here in this yard, an' in the office, most all the time."

The little one looked around wonderingly, and the Squire watched her carefully. Finally he resumed: "And so ye don't think ye would like it over to the Poor Farm, eh?"

There was a vigorous shake of the head, this time, and, half to himself, the Squire continued, "No, I don't believe ye would, nuther. I've lived here over sixty years now, and we never had a child over there yet, and," he continued, "it's kinder late to start in now."

He thought for a moment — peered around carefully — then, drawing her nearer to him, said in a half-whisper: "Do ye s'pose ye would like it any better here? Ye see, we never had no little gals, and now all our boys has grow'd up and gone away, and, I tell ye —" the Squire paused and sighed — "it's kind o' lonesome here sometimes."

"Oh, I'd just love to be here, where my mamma used to be, when she was a little girl, but —" Suddenly the child stopped and grew sober. She

glanced toward the house. Then she pointed.

"But ain't that woman in there cranky?"

"Hish-h-h-h-h!" exclaimed the Squire, looking toward the house, "Cranky? What are ye talkin' about?"

"Well," the child said, shaking her head, "she sounded kind o' cranky when she told that man to come in there."

"Lordy! That's a bluff," said the Squire, with a snort. "Now I'll tell ye about that. That woman is a phenolomal, a perfect phenolomal! An' I tell you why. Her heart and her tongue ain't connected at all. Her tongue is pique-ed at times, — there ain't no gettin' around that — but a kinder hearted, tenderer woman don't draw the breath o' life than Betsy Gould. Why do ye know, she's that tender-hearted that —"

At this moment Betsy's voice was heard across the yard, in strident tones: "Silas Dalby, take your feet off them cushions!"

The Squire, who had stopped for an instant, continued: "But, as I said, her heart and her tongue don't work on the same principle. Never you mind. I'll fix her in two minutes so she'll love you like a house afire, an' make her think she is doing it all herself, too. That's the way to handle women. Make 'em think they're doing something ye don't

want 'em to. Now you set down, over there, and see me get a good scolding."

The Squire pointed to the steps, where she seated herself again, watching him wonderingly. When she was seated, the Squire turned and called again. "Betsy! Oh, Betsy!"

"Well, what do ye want now?" an impatient voice came from the house.

"Come out here a minute. I want to ask ye suthin'," he answered. There was a pause, and then Betsy came across the yard, wiping her hands on her apron as she came.

"Now, William Tappan, you have either got to move your office into the kitchen or I'll move the kitchen out here," she sputtered. "I can't keep traipsin' out here every minute."

"Oh, set down and behave yourself," the Squire said, laughing.

He arose and placed a rocking chair under the old elm for her. She sat in it and fanned herself with her apron. The Squire continued. "Set down there and get cooled off. You're all het up. I swan! It tuckers me all out to see you flax round so all the time."

The Squire was now searching around — under chairs, behind trees, and through his pockets.

"Ye hain't seen last night's paper, have ye?"

"Well, good Lordy!" exclaimed Betsy, "ye

didn't git me out here to read the paper, did ye?"

"No, no," the Squire hastened to reply, sitting in his big chair again, crossing his legs and sitting back comfortably. "No, no. But there was a funny little story in there that kind o' got me to thinkin'."

"Humph!" grunted Betsy, "it must have been funny to set you to thinking."

"Ye-us," continued the Squire easily, "it was dretful funny. It seems there wuz a young feller wandering along, out west, somewheres. He'd kind o' gone away from home lookin' for his fortune. Why, come to think of it, he wuz a young feller like our Ben or Will. And as he wuz a-walk-in' along a country road one day, he came to a little house, where there wuz an old feller and his sister livin'. By golly! That's funny, ain't it? This old couple wuz something like us, too. Well, this feller had come a long way and he didn't have no work 'n' no money, nuther, an' he wuz feelin' kind o' sick an' discouraged, and so he went in the yard of this little house, like ours, an' asked the old couple there — the folks like us, ye know — if they couldn't kind o' help him a little. But this old couple wuz pooty wise, old folks. They knew all about them tramps that come along that way. So they just turned up their noses, and said to this

young feller — like our Will or Ben, ye know — they says: 'No, sir. If ye ain't able to look out fer yerself, go 'long over to the Poor Farm. That's kept, purpose for jest sech shiftless critters as you be!' Well, there wan't nuthin' else to do, so the young feller went to the Poor Farm."

The Squire stopped. He sat back, swinging his foot and striking his chin. Betsy looked at him closely. She could not see the point of the story — yet. The Squire made no move to go on.

"Well," said Betsy, "what about it?"

"Oh, nuthin'," he replied, "only I wuz thinkin' it wuz a pooty good joke on the young feller."

Betsy's head began to go back.

"Oh, it wuz a joke, wuz it?"

"Why, yes," the Squire said, carelessly. "The young feller thought all he had to do wuz to go up to the fu'st folks he come to and git fed fer nuthin'. But them old folks wuz wise. They says: 'No, sir! The Poor Farm is the place for such as you.' Pooty good joke, I think."

Betsy had reached the limit. She had only waited to give the Squire a good chance to hook himself, before she landed him.

"Oh, that is a joke, is it? That is your idea of a joke? Umph-m-m-m!" She looked at him disdainfully. "And folks think you are soft and kind-

hearted. It's a good thing they don't know ye as I do. Sendin' young fellers to the Poor Farm jest because they ain't got a pocket full of money. What do ye think the Lord gives one person more money than another for, if it ain't so that them that has got it kin help them that hain't got it? The Poor Farm is for useless, old critters, like you an' me, not for young 'uns, ye old heathen, ye!"

Betsy had worked herself into a blaze of indignation and eloquence. The Squire sat taking his medicine, but tickled. The minute Betsy stopped to take a breath he exclaimed, delightedly: "I knew it! I knew it!"

He rose and went over to the pathetic little figure on the doorstep, and placed his hand on her shoulder, turning to the indignant Betsy.

"Well, Betsy, here's a little gal whose father went away four years ago to find his fortune, jest the same as our boys did. And a couple o' weeks ago her mother — well — she found her fortune, an' went to Heaven to enjoy it. An' it's left to this little gal to do the best she can on nuthin'."

He stood by the child, looking at the commitment papers which he had unfolded. "She's — er — er been committed to the Poor Farm here. Silas wuz takin' her over. He jest stopped here to git me to sign the commitment papers. I — er — er — ain't signed 'em yet. I — er — er — didn't know

but you might have some suggestions to make about it."

All through the latter part of this speech, Betsy had been getting nearer and nearer to the exploding point. She had now arrived.

"Suggestions, eh? Suggestions! Gim'me them papers."

She snatched them from the Squire's hand.

"Well, say," said the Squire, hastily, "them's legal papers, ye know!"

"I don't care if they're George Washington's marriage certificate!" and Betsy flounced around and faced the house. "Silas Dalby! Silas M. Dalby!" When Betsy addressed anybody with the middle initial, it meant serious business.

"Yes, ma'am," came from the house. "What is it?"

"Come out here! To onct."

"Well, say,"—started the Squire.

"You shet right up now," said Betsy, again addressing the house. "Silas Dalby, be ye a comin'?"

"Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am," exclaimed Silas, coming out of the kitchen, wiping his lips with his coat sleeve, "what do ye want?"

"I want you, and I want ye quick. Come here."

Betsy was striding up the yard and out through the gate. She began with trembling hands to untie the horse. Silas followed her in wonder and fear. The

Squire stood by the door of the office, watching the progress of the flames he had kindled.

Betsy, still busy with the knots, nodded her head toward the wagon.

"Get into that wagon, Silas M. Dalby."

"Why, Mis' Gould, what's the matter?" Silas protested.

By this time Betsy had the horse untied. She shoved Silas toward the wagon.

"Get into that wagon or I'll jab a pin into ye."

Silas ventured to remonstrate, but kept climbing into the wagon. "Why, Mis' Gould, I ain't done nothin'."

"I know ye ain't, and ye ain't goin' to 'nuther. Now here," and she shoved the reins into his hands. "Here's what ye're goin' to do. Ye're going to get out o' here just as quick as the Lord 'll let ye."

Silas concluded this was good advice, so he hurriedly slapped the old horse with the reins and started off, up the road, in the opposite direction from that which he had intended.

Betsy stood glaring after him. She tore the offending commitment papers into ribbons and threw them after him.

"And if ye ever come round here agin, with any such devilment, I'll scald ye."

Then she turned on the Squire, panting from her exertions and her indignation.

"And you!"

The Squire gave Nannie a side look, as if saying, "Now it's my turn."

Betsy went on, "You, William Tappan, Lawyer!"

She looked even more scornfully at him. "Lawyer? Scamp. That's what ye be. You — and Silas Dalby — a couple of old scamps." She turned and swept by him scornfully to where little Nannie sat watching everything, with her big, brown eyes.

Betsy stood looking pityingly down at her a moment, then her big, mother-heart went out to her, in a flood of love and pity.

"You poor little lamb, you. You come right straight along with me."

She held out both hands and lifted the child to her feet. Then she took one little hand and swept by the Squire toward the kitchen door. She looked back at him again, with that withering look of scorn. At the door she paused.

"And you! You needn't come to supper, for there won't be none for ye." She drew the little girl into the house and closed the door.

The Squire had stood motionless all through this. His plan had worked. For he knew that when the little girl, with her carpet bag, had gone in through that kitchen door, it meant that she was thenceforth a member of the family. So he smiled, sighed, and

sat down again in the old armchair, waiting to be called to supper.

Perhaps, ten minutes later, a little girl in a red plaid dress and a neat, little, white apron came out of the kitchen door, with a hop-skip-and-a-jump, across the yard, to the Squire and stopped at his side.

"Er-er-er-that woman says for you to come to your supper."

The Squire glanced up from under his old hat rim, tossed away the end of his cigar, arose, and hand in hand, the old man and the little child went in at the kitchen door.

CHAPTER III

THE wintry days had come. The snow lay in huge drifts about the old house and the office. The Squire was not, as a usual thing, strongly impressed with the joy of manual labor, but this year, his paths from the house to the office, and from the house and office to the street, were wide and well kept. There was a feeling in the Squire's heart, never expressed, and probably not more than half admitted to himself, that in doing this, he was, in some way, helping the boys, for this had always been their duty.

The first snowstorm had brought about a condition of affairs that puzzled him. He had carefully shoveled out every path. He had banked up the house and office with snow. He had done everything that he could remember the boys were accustomed to do and still, as he stood on the doorstep and looked about the yard, it did not seem right. It looked lonesome.

And it was not till two weeks later that he discovered what troubled him. The yard was too smooth and orderly. There were no huge snow

balls, rolled up by boyish hands; no snow man; no snow forts.

The Squire shook his head and gave it up. "I'm a derved old fool!" he said and went into the house to see if Nannie couldn't come over to the office and help him clean up. The Squire would get Nannie and proceed to clean up nearly every day. No one knew, not even the Squire himself, how much this little girl was taking the place of the absent ones. There was so much of the child in the old man's nature that, without children, his life was miserable.

Women, with the exception of Betsy, bothered him. Men — well, men were all right, but — he didn't know why it was, only with children he was happier and more at home.

So the little, dark-haired, brown-eyed girl and the white-haired old man became the dearest and closest friends. There had been one point of discussion between him and Betsy that had threatened to cause trouble. This was the form of address little Nannie was to use in speaking to the Squire. He wanted her to call him: "Uncle Bill," the same as the boys did, but Betsy's mother heart did not want others, "An' them no blood relation," to usurp the title that belonged to her boys.

The argument lasted two or three days and then the little girl, in her childish wisdom, solved the

problem. Coming in hastily, she exclaimed, "Oh! Uncle Mister Tappan."

"That's it," said the Squire. "Now we're all satisfied."

Every night at five o'clock Nannie and the Squire went to the Post Office. The Squire said he went to get the paper, but Betsy knew that a possible letter from one of the boys was the incentive, and she could tell as soon as she saw him returning, whether the paper alone had come, or whether there was a letter from Boston or New York. If she could not have told by his walk, she could by his hat. The Squire's hat was an unfailing barometer of his mental condition. When he was happy and cheerful, it was on the back of his head. Over his eyes, it signified discouragement. Over one eye, it meant, "Look out!"

When she saw him coming from the Post Office on winter nights, with his hat over his forehead and his hands deep in his pockets, she would sigh, and set the table for supper. By the time the Squire reached the house, he would wear a bluff air of briskness and bustle, but Betsy knew what was in his heart.

As the winter went by, they learned to expect the New York letter every Monday night, for Ben never let a Sunday afternoon pass without writing home to the old folks.

The Boston letters became more and more in-

frequent and the news they contained was not reassuring. Ben's letters told only of success — if there were failures, he never told of them. He was doing well in the office; liked the people and the work, and his employers seemed to like him. On the first of January his salary had been raised to eighteen dollars a week.

But poor Will. Somehow it seemed to be the same in Boston as formerly in Bradford. He did not get the chance. There were hundreds of positions which he could have filled, and much better than they were now filled, too. But, somehow he was always just a little too late in applying for these positions, or there was some adverse influence working against him.

These letters developed a peculiar trait which hides in all human hearts. The letters from New York, cool, calm and full of bright hopes became a matter of course. Six days in the week they were neither looked for nor expected.

The Boston letter was looked for, every day, every mail. When received, it was read and re-read feverishly and anxiously. Let the two letters come in the same mail and the New York letter was laid aside for a later reading. The Boston letter was read at once.

The Squire was thinking this over one night as he and Betsy sat alone in the old sitting-room, after

Nannie had gone to bed. His mind went back over twenty years. He could see that it had always been this way and it worried him. It did not seem that Ben was treated fairly. As a result of his legal training, he went to work to analyze the case, taking his own testimony and cross examining himself. His decision, arrived at after an hour's study, was to this effect: "It ain't that we love Will any better 'n we do Ben. It ain't that we are any more anxious to help Will. But the poor feller has always needed more help."

The winter days went by and summer came again. Ben was coming home on his first vacation during July and was bringing visitors with him. The son and daughter of one of his employers were coming up to stop for a week or so at Bill Silver's. Betsy and Nannie had already cleaned house twice and were at it again.

Betsy and the Squire wanted Ben and his friends to come right to the house. The Squire could sleep in the office, and there was plenty of room. But Harry and Kate Gordon would not hear of it. They could only stop for a few days, on their way to the White Mountains, and would not discommode Ben's people for such a short time.

Mrs. Silver had a rambling old house of sixteen rooms and had, for five or six years, been taking summer boarders and, as the Squire said, her "coo-

sine " was very highly spoken of. So the two front rooms had been engaged.

They arrived on a rainy night and went direct to the Silver's. The Squire had been called to Sutton South on a law case. Harry Gordon had come over to call on the following morning. He was a clean-cut, shrewd New Yorker, the son of wealthy parents, with every chance to become a wild and reckless young chap. But, somehow, he hadn't. He had not seen much of Ben, but what he had seen of him, he liked. So he had come to his home to see if Bradford was really as lovely a place as it had been pictured.

He came in through the gate, in front of the Squire's office and met Ben coming across the yard from the house.

"Hello there, Commodore," he cried, "what's the matter with this for a pretty good morning?"

"Oh, this is the kind of mornings we have here all the time," said Ben, as they shook hands. Ben was looking somewhat anxiously toward the road.

"Where is Kate?" he asked.

Harry seemed surprised. "What Kate?"

"Why, your sister Kate, of course," said Ben.

"Oh, no," said Harry, throwing himself down into the Squire's old armchair, by the door of the office. "There is no 'of course' about it. There

are probably several Kates in the village, and when you say simply Kate, I —"

Ben laughed, but said nothing. Harry sat back and looked him over critically.

"It seems to me that you are mightily interested in my sister. What have you to do with where she is, anyway? I begin to think it is my duty, as her brother, to ask you what your intentions are."

Ben colored a little. "If you don't let up it will be my intention to duck you in the horse trough."

"Bet you ten you can't do it," said Harry, starting to rise.

Ben placed his hand on his shoulder and pushed him back.

"All right. All right," he said, "as long as you apologize I won't do it. But, just the same, where is she? She said she would be over, right after breakfast."

"Hish."

Harry had his hand on his ear. "I think I hear the music of her fairy feet."

Harry went to the gate, came back and took Ben's arm and led him up to where he could see down the roadway.

An instant later, Kate Gordon came through the gate. She was a typical, New York girl, well dressed, jolly, unaffected and charming.

Ben sprang forward and took the packages she

was carrying, and offered her a seat under the big tree.

"Where is the wonderful Uncle?" said Harry.
"What is he? President?"

"No," said Ben, as he seated himself beside Kate, on a rustic seat. "No, not quite, but he's an important factor in the town. He is the First Selectman, which is the highest office here. He is the Sheriff of the County, Justice of the Peace, Highway Commissioner, and I don't know what else. And, furthermore, he is the best, dearest, old fellow in the world."

"Oh, I should know that," said Harry, "your uncle would *have* to be."

At this moment an old, querulous voice, down the road was heard:

"Say, Squire, did ye git my pension money yet?"

And the Squire's voice could be heard answering:
"Why ye derved, old fool, I only sent in your application yisterday."

Ben sprang up and went to the gate. "There he comes now. Bless his old heart," he said.

Harry grunted. "Humph! He must be dead slow if he can't get a pension out of this government in twenty-four hours."

The Squire now came to the gate, in Silas Dalby's wagon. When they were about fifty feet from the gate, Silas began winding the reins about his hands

and bracing himself to meet any "tantrums" of "the colt."

"Whoa! Whoa!" cried Silas. The poor old horse had no objection in the world to whoaing. In fact, the one great ambition of his life for the past ten years had been to whoa, and stay whoaed. But Silas had not begun to realize it yet. Even after the old horse had stopped, and the Squire was preparing to get out, he suddenly made a grab at the reins and yelled: "Whoa!" again. The Squire sat back and looked at the others.

"Why don't some of you folks come out here and stop this wild Arabian Charger? Don't ye see Silas can't hold him?"

The Squire got out and came in at the gate. Ben ran to meet him and shook his hand delightedly.

"Uncle Bill, how are you? By George, you get better looking every day."

"I must have been pretty tough when I started, then," the Squire replied. Then holding Ben off and looking at him earnestly, he continued, "You ain't lookin' so awful bad yourself. How are ye?"

"Oh, I'm fine, Uncle Bill," Ben replied; then leading him over to Kate, he said: "Kate, I want you to meet my Uncle Bill. Uncle, this is Miss Gordon, of whom I have written you so much."

"How do you do? How do you do?" and the Squire's old soft hat was off. He was shaking

Kate's hand, while his sharp old eyes were taking in every feature of the girl. "I'm mighty glad to meet any friend of the boy's."

"And I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Tappan. Ben has been talking so much about you that I feel pretty well acquainted with you already," said Kate.

"Ben talkin' about me, eh? Could bring action agin him for that," laughed the Squire.

Harry making pretense of being slighted, now hustled down between Ben, Kate and the Squire, and said quickly: "And Mr. Tappan, I want you to meet a friend of mine: a noble young fellow; one of the most beautiful characters I have ever met."

Extending his left hand, and pointing at the Squire, "Mr. Tappan," then pointing to himself with his right hand — "Mr. Harry Gordon of New York." He immediately grasped the Squire's hand in both his, and began shaking it violently.

"Mr. Tappan, you don't know how delighted I am — to — Wow — wow — wow —"

He hastily tore his hand away from the Squire, who stood watching him with a twinkle in his eye.

Harry examined his crushed fingers. The Squire remarked he was glad to see him.

"I should say you were," said Harry. Then turning to Ben he said: "Did I understand you to say your uncle was a lawyer?"

CHAPTER IV

IT was a great day for Bradford. "Holdin's Greatest Consolidated Circus, Menagerie and Congress of Nations" was to give a "Complete, Consolidated Exhibition of all that was Wonderful Beneath the Skies, in Water-proof Tented Coliseums." And for this one day only, the prices would be "Slashed from Fifty to the Small Sum of Ten Cents."

For a week the conduct of the small boy had been something suspicious. They had even *asked* to do chores. The reigning price was ten cents for anything. There was hardly a labor of Hercules for which some boy could not have been found, to at least promise accomplishment, for the small sum of ten cents.

At early morning, the greater part of the male population, between six and sixty, had been down around the old ten acre lot, watching for the circus to come in. Several had ventured up to the top of Obadiah Ring's Hill to meet the cages, and when the first wagons arrived on the grounds they were accompanied with a youthful guard of honor.

Oh, the charm and mystery of it all! The fascina-

tion of those closed cages! What might they not contain? And that delightful, tantalizing mixture of smells which surrounds a circus! A crowd of open-mouthed, awe-stricken men and boys stood around each gang of stake drivers. With what wonderful precision they swung those great sledges! The hostlers moved around in a halo of reflected glory, as they fed or cleaned the horses. Even the cook, dumping huge baskets of potatoes into the great, iron kettle, was an artist. Half a dozen boys who had secured a job carrying water from the town pump to the lot, were looked upon with envy by the less fortunate. Some of the boys went home for a bite, but most of them took a chance and risked the possibility of a thrashing.

The excitement was not confined to the small boys. A close observer would have noticed that smoke from the kitchen chimneys, all through the village, was an hour or two earlier than usual. Housewives sputtered and scolded about "sech foolishness," but it was a peculiar fact that breakfast was finished and the dishes washed up on this morning at about the time it usually began. The men folks, instead of being at their usual occupation, in overalls and cowhide boots, now stood foolishly around the front yards, dressed in their best suits. By the time it was fairly light, wagons began to rumble and rattle along and rickety hay-ricks began to ar-

rive in the village, each with its load of grinning boys and girls and scolding parents.

The Squire was the busiest man in the village. He did not care about circuses personally, but he hated to have any of the "little fellers" miss it. So he had a dozen or fifteen ragged scamps running about the yard, waiting for the time to start.

The parade was a great success, only they kept the animal cages closed. There were several ponies, a lot of monkeys and clowns, and a camel that the Squire said looked like Horace Walsh, the village post-master.

When one o'clock came and the doors were opened, the Squire was one of the first to enter, with his crowd of "little fellers."

In two minutes the Squire and his tatterdemalion army were strung along on the very top seat, near the band. A little later, Ben, Kate, Harry, Betsy and Nannie came in together. They sat down low on the front seat, as Betsy wanted "to be handy to the door in case o' fire."

The Squire had a pocket full of five cent pieces, and never, under any pretext, could he be induced to display anything larger than a nickel. If he bought a bag of peanuts, he handed the man a five cent piece for it. If it was a glass of red lemonade, he had a nickel ready to hand the man. When the man asked him if he had the change for a dollar,

the Squire gave him a withering look, and replied he had not. When the man wanted to bet him he could not tell under which shell the little pea was, he told him: "That's the way I'm bettin'." When the man wanted to bet him a dollar he didn't have a dollar, he asked him: "If I hain't got a dollar, how am I goin' to bet a dollar?" "Never show large money at a circus," he said to Tom Flinders when Tom told him the ticket wagon gave him only thirty cents change from a dollar.

The "Grand Entrée" was over. The bandmen took their seats in the band stand, and the real show began. And oh, what wonderful strength! What marvelous skill! How wonderful and bewildering!

The "gentlemanly ushers" passed around among them selling tickets to the "Grand Concert," which would take place immediately after the show, in the big tent, was over. "And remember, good people, the price for this day only, is only the small sum of half a dime — the twentieth part of a dollar!"

The Squire counted his party of "little fellers" to see that it had not shrunk, and then counted out very slowly and carefully, fifteen five cent pieces to the "gentlemanly usher." The gentlemanly usher watched this proceeding disgustedly, and, as the Squire carefully deposited the last nickel into his hand, said, "Pretty wise old duck, ain't you?"

"Oh, I guess I don't need a gardeen at a ten-cent circus yet," replied the Squire cheerfully.

When the show was all over, and they were all on the way home, there was much discussion as to the merits of the performance. Harry said it was so bad it was "great." The Squire said it was a "fu'st rate show." But then every show the Squire saw was "fu'st rate." Nannie thought it was the grandest thing she ever saw in her life, and it probably was.

While all this had been going on, Abe Slocum had been putting in a day of excitement. The advance agent of the circus had made a contract with him, the week before, whereby he was to deliver a load of hay at the grounds at eight o'clock in the morning and for which he was to receive eight dollars. So, promptly at eight o'clock, Abe drove to the grounds with a heaping load of hay.

"Where's the manager?" he inquired of one of the men.

"I dunno. Out 'round the tent there somewhere," was the reply. Abe slid down off the load and went around the tent, hunting for the manager. He could not find him. By the time he got back to his team, some of the circus men were just climbing up on the load to pitch it off.

"Here now, git right off there. That don't come off till I git my money!" shouted Abe.

The men turned and looked at him. "Why, what's the matter with you? You don't think we'd beat you out of your money, do you?"

"I know derned well ye won't," replied Abe.

"But we want to feed our horses."

"Then ye better buy some hay to feed 'em with."

"We have bought this hay, haven't we?"

"No, sir! Not yet, ye hain't."

"What's the reason we haven't?"

"'Cause ye hain't paid fer it, that's why. When I git my money ye kin pitch it off, an' not before," said Abe.

The men went away grumbling, but soon came back with the manager.

"Are you the man who owns this hay?" he asked of Abe.

"Yes, sir," and Abe handed him the official weight card, signed by the town weigh-master.

The manager looked at it and nodded his head. "Come around here out of the way," he said to Abe. They stepped around back of the load. The two men climbed upon the load and began pitching it off. The manager tendered Abe a twenty dollar bill in payment. Abe could not furnish change for a one, much less a twenty, so he went over to the depot to get George Mitchel to change it. Abe wasn't gone five minutes, but when he came back the

hay rack was empty. Not only was the hay gone, but the old horse was gone.

"Where's my hoss?" yelled Abe.

A man told Abe that his father came and got it. As Abe's father had been dead for thirty years, this seemed a little doubtful, so he promptly called the man a "liar," and started off up the street.

"Here," cried the manager, "give me my change!"

Abe rushed back, counted twelve dollars into the man's hand and started off again.

"Here," yelled the manager, "this isn't right."

Abe tore back again. "What's the matter now?" he asked.

"Matter?" exclaimed the manager, "the matter is, there is only eleven dollars here."

Abe grabbed the money and tried to count it, but he was so excited he could not count above six to save his life.

"Give me that money," said the manager, and taking the entire twenty, he counted out eight one dollar bills into Abe's hand, and away went Abe for his horse. He was gone about fifteen minutes. When he came back he found that the circus man had sold his hay rack to a man from North Sutton for a dollar and a half. Then he examined his eight dollars and found he had one good bill, one confederate bill, and six pieces of paper advertising "Hamlin's

Wizard Oil." Abe started for the Squire. It was a case calling for the law. The Squire immediately made out a writ of attachment, and sent Tom Flinders to serve it.

When they reached the grounds they found the manager had taken the nine o'clock train for Warner, where the circus was to be the next day. They went over and borrowed Silas Dalby's Arabian Charger and started for Warner.

Just as they were starting out, George Mitchell came running over from the depot with the information that the twenty dollar bill Abe had brought was a counterfeit, and that Abe would have to make good.

"Nice circus!" said Abe.

"Get up!" said Tom.

And off they started for Warner.

CHAPTER V

IT was about five o'clock in the afternoon. The Squire, Ben and Kate sat under the tree by the office. Ben had started the Squire on his favorite hobby. It had taken considerable coaxing to get him to talk about it before a stranger, but once started, Ben laid back and let him have the conversation to himself.

"Of course," said the Squire, "I don't want ye to think I am findin' fault with the way the Lord is runnin' things, or as meanin' that I could do it any better, but it does seem to me that if you jest turned things right 'round, it wouldn't hurt nuthin'. Ye see, instead o' havin' folks born babies and growin' old an' dyin', I'd have 'em born old critters and grow young. Say, for instance, everybody is born eighty years old. In the fu'st place, instead o' comin' into the world knowin' nothin' an' havin' to learn everything by bitter experience, ye would know it all at the start, and all ye would have to do would be to forgit a little every day instead o' learnin' it. It's so much easier to forgit than to learn. Ye would know jest how to go to work to do things and git some money together. Then agin,

take a young feller that has learned to do somethin' and git some money, he feels so good that he can't help spendin' it all, havin' a good time. But if he wuz an old critter, seventy years old, he wouldn't keer nuthin' about kitin' round, raisin' Cain. It would be his fun to jest save up his money an' take care o' things. Then, after he'd lived ten or fifteen years, he would be meetin' his old wife, at the time when, as things are now, she dies and leaves him. Then for the next twenty years, they'd live along together an' be happy that way. Ye see, they would know each other fu'st off, an' not have to spend a lot o' years gittin' acquainted. An' all the time they are gittin' younger, an' feelin' better every minit. 'Time he gits back to forty he's rich. Rich, when he's young and full o' health and strength, and able to enjoy it. An' he keeps on gittin' younger an' younger, an' bimeby he's jest a young feller. Now, ye see, instead uv his wife dyin', jest the time he's gittin' to love her the best, an' needin' her the most, it jest keeps agoin' back and back, till finally one day he's walkin' along the street and meets her, an' don't know her at all. She's jest the same girl, that, livin' as ye do now, he meets then for the fu'st time. But in this way o' mine she jest passes out o' his life an' he never thinks of her agin, cause he don't know she ever existed. He keeps goin' back, an' gittin' younger, an' bimeby his biggest pleasure

a wild-animal cage, and one good dollar bill. He owed George Mitchell twenty dollars, and there was no hope in his soul.

The cavalcade stopped. Tom leaned forward with his elbows on his knees awaiting further instructions. Abe leaned over the fence. Ben and the Squire approached and curiously gazed at the layout. Finally the Squire looked up at Tom and said,

"Well, Tom, are you and Abe goin' into the circus bizness?"

"Well, no," replied Tom calmly, "not so's you'd notice it."

By this time, Betsy and Nannie had crept cautiously across the yard. Kate had beckoned to Nannie and she had hastened to her side. They stood on the steps of the office, Nannie clasping Kate's hand fearfully. Betsy had taken her stand well back in the yard, near an old elm tree which had a circular seat built around it.

By this time, half the town had gathered at a safe distance from the animal cage and were awaiting developments.

Harry Gordon had heard the commotion and came over to investigate. He walked carefully around the cage and glancing over at the Squire, exclaimed:

"What is it? A special matinée?"

"Not guilty for me," the Squire answered.

"You'll have to ask Tom." After a moment he added:

"Tom, what is it, anyway?"

Tom uncurled his legs, wound the reins around the whip, and sat back clasping his knees.

"Well," he began, "I believe you issued a writ uv attachment agin the circus, fer hay Abe Slocum sold 'em, didn't ye?"

"I b'lieve I did," admitted the Squire.

"Well, I've served it."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said the Squire. "But what have ye got there?"

"I dunno. I tuk the fust thing I come to," said Tom.

"It growls something like a hyenie," said Abe.

"Sounds more like a lion to me," said Tom.

Nannie, her teeth chattering with fright, stated that it was an elephant.

"Must be a folding one, then," ejaculated Harry, at which the Squire relaxed and laughed, relieving the general tension.

"Here now," said the Squire, "this is no laughin' matter."

"Why, what's the matter?" queried Harry.

"There's a whole lot the matter when ye come to look the matter over."

"But what is it, Uncle? What *is* the matter?" asked Ben.

"Well, I'll tell you what's the matter," replied the Squire. "Do ye know what these dunderheads have done?"

"Done jest what ye told us to do," said Tom, in an aggrieved tone of voice.

"Yes," said the Squire, "an' you've done a dern sight more'n I told ye to, too."

"William, what is it?" inquired Betsy anxiously.

"Well," said the Squire, looking from one to another, as if for sympathy and approval, "you folks know jest as well as I do what the proceedin's be in a case o' this kind. You know the law says when property is attached for debt, it has to be held for thirty days, an' then sold at auction to the highest bidder."

"Well," said Abe Slocum inquiringly.

The Squire turned on him like a flash.

"Well, ye fat-headed populist, you. How do ye suppose I'm goin' to feed a lot o' elephants an' hyenies an' lions for a month?"

This was a phase of the matter of which no one else had thought, so they were all silent. Presently, Betsy spoke up.

"Well, I kin jest tell ye, I hain't a-goin' to cook fer 'em."

The Squire turned and regarded her gravely for a moment.

"What do ye think lions eat? Pie?" he asked.

"What *do* lions eat? Uncle Mister Tappan," asked Nannie, big eyed.

"There! Now *you* come," said the Squire, turning toward her, "I don't know what lions eat. I never fed a lion in my life."

The Squire went over the matter in his mind, but it was too much for him. He looked around. The crowd in the street was increasing every minute. He sighed and went up nearer to the cage. Then he addressed Tom.

"I guess ye might as well drive yer menagerie into the barnyard. Ye'll have the hull town round here, if ye don't."

Tom drove the cage of mystery into the barnyard, and the Squire closed the gate, speaking to those outside as he did so.

"An' the rest of you fellers better run right home. This is strictly a legal affair, an' ef we need any witnesses we'll send for ye."

Harry Gordon had followed the wagon into the yard and was walking about it trying to find a peek-hole. The Squire stood watching him for a moment. Then Harry chanced to look up and catch his eye. He grinned foolishly.

"Go ahead," said the Squire, "peek in an' see how big he is."

Harry shoved his hands into his pockets and walked around the cage, examining it critically, then

said as he walked away. "Oh, no. Not I. It isn't my lion. You peek."

This suggestion did not appeal to the Squire very forcibly, but every one was watching, so he had to do something. He cautiously circled around the cage, drawing nearer and nearer to it. All stood breathlessly observing him, excepting Betsy, who was closely watching a couple of small boys who showed strong symptoms of climbing over the fence near the shed. Finally the silence behind her attracted her notice and she turned to discover the cause. The Squire had by this time worked his way cautiously up to within five or six feet of the cage. The minute Betsy saw him she yelled out:

"William! William Tappan, come away from there!"

"Shet up yer head!" cried the Squire, as he jumped back. "I ain't a-goin' ter hurt him," soliloquizing, "any one would think it wuz a cata-mount."

He again advanced, nearer and nearer. He had discovered a hole through which he thought he could get a look into the interior of the cage. He had just raised himself on tiptoe, when there came a sudden, strange sound from the inside of the cage. The Squire leaped backward. Tom gave a flying leap off the cage. Ben pulled Kate and Nannie back into the office. Harry sprang back, tripped over a

root, and fell into the flower bed. Betsy jumped and landed upon the seat around the tree, and stood there trembling, with her skirts gathered up around her. The Squire was the first to "come to." He looked around at the others, and began to grin, then noticing Betsy on the seat, exclaimed: "I'll bet you're safe. No lion could ever climb up there."

Dolefully gazing at the cage, he addressed his companions.

"Say, didn't ye think that noise wuz a little weak fer a lion's voice?"

Tom came from behind the cage with a long pole in his hands. "Say," he began, "this contraption is jest a cage, all made out o' iron bars, an' them sides is jest wooden shutters. I b'lieve ef I could jest push that little snap-dingus up there, we could get the shetters off, an' see what's inside."

The Squire wanted to know the worst, and there-upon told Tom to go ahead and "poke the dingus."

Standing away as far as he could, Tom began poking at the hasp of the shutters. All watched him breathlessly. Betsy had seized a piece of rock about the size of a hen's egg, and was preparing to sell her life as dearly as possible. Nannie grasped a stove poker in one hand and a dust brush in the other.

Tom would give a poke at the hasp and then jump back, advancing again with another poke. Finally, he struck the combination. The "shetters"

dropped and everybody sprang back, only to lean forward again in astonishment. For there, exposed to their wondering gaze, they saw, not the fierce, blood-thirsty lion they had all expected to see, but a small boy of ten or twelve years of age, dressed in an old, ragged, clown suit, fast asleep upon the floor of the cage.

Speechless, they drew forward and looked at the urchin. For a moment not a word was spoken, then the Squire turned to Tom and asked, "Is — er — that your lion, Tom?"

Tom hitched up his trousers, shifted his position, and replied, "Looks more like a boy to me."

"Yes," answered the Squire, "looks as much like a boy as it does like anything. Don't look much like anything I ever see." Pausing a moment, he resumed: "Guess we'd better interview the animal, hadn't we?"

Stepping forward, he addressed the sleeping boy: "Hey, there! Hey!" he exclaimed. There was no reply. The Squire turned to Tom, alarmed.

"You don't s'pose he's dead, do ye?"

But at this juncture the sleeper indulged in a yawn that precluded any suspicion of the existence of such a deplorable state of affairs. This explained one mystery — the terrible sounds that had been taken for the lion's roar. The Squire gave a sigh of relief.

"I guess he's alive all right. Gosh! But that's an awful big yawn fer sech a small boy, ain't it? I guess Tom, seein' as how you are the trainer of this cirkis, you better poke 'im up a little, so we can interview 'im."

Tom inserted the end of the pole in the cage and gave the boy a poke. The boy squirmed away. Tom poked again. Nannie started forward. "Now don't hurt 'im. He hain't done nuthin'."

"I ain't a-goin' to hurt 'im," said Tom, "I'm jest wakin' 'im up."

The little fellow now began to show more signs of life. He stretched out one leg, then the other. His face commenced to work in a fearful and wonderful manner. It became tied up in a sort of complicated, double bow-knot. He squirmed over on his back and prepared to go to sleep again.

The Squire hastily stepped forward. "Here! Here there! Wake up! Wake up!"

The boy opened his eyes, sleepily, winked two or three times, and then turned his head until he saw the circle of wondering faces around him. He looked curiously from one to another until he had viewed the entire circle; then sat up, still looking at them, and said:

"Oh, gee!"

"Well, young man," said the Squire, "what are ye doin' there?"

The boy opened his mouth to reply, when he evidently considered it too much trouble, and was about to lie down again.

"No, no! Here, here!" exclaimed the Squire.
"Set up there. I'm talkin' to ye."

The boy sat up resignedly.

"Now what are ye doin' in that cage?" queried the Squire.

"Sleepin'."

"What are ye sleepin' in there for?"

"'Cause I wuz sleepy."

"But what are ye sleepin' in a lion's cage fer? Where is yer lion?"

"Augh! We ain't got no lion."

"Then what have ye got a lion's cage fer?"

"Oh, that's jest to fool the Rubes with."

Harry Gordon interrupted: "Er — er — excuse me, but might I ask just what you mean by — er — 'Rubes,' young man?"

The boy looked at Harry, then at the Squire, then to Tom and Abe. His countenance lit up, as he pointed to Tom and Abe:

"Them. They're Rubes," he said.

"O-h y-e-s," replied Harry. "I have always wondered just what was the correct definition of that word."

"Well," said the Squire, quaintly, "I got out o' that better'n I expected. I allers had a idee that I

wuz a kind of a Rube." Turning to the boy he continued his interrogations.

"Where's your folks? Your father and mother?"

"Ain't got none."

About this time, Tom was struck with an idea. This was such an uncommon occurrence that it demanded immediate attention, so he broke in.

"Well, say, them cirkis folks wuz packin' up w'en I wuz down to the grounds, so hadn't we better let this critter out so he kin go 'long an' ketch 'em?"

The Squire turned and regarded Tom meditatively.

"Oh, that is what you would do, is it? It's quite evident you don't appreciate the true beauties of this mess you have got me into — yet."

"Why, what's the matter now, Uncle?" asked Ben.

"Well, I'll tell ye what's the matter. I instruct this dough-headed deputy of mine to go down there and attach something, don't I? Well, he goes down and attaches this cage, don't he? Now, the law sez I shall keep this cage and contents fer thirty days an' then sell 'em to the highest bidder. Now! Kin you see anybody biddin' on that?" pointing to the boy.

Ben turned to Kate and remarked, "I can see the finish of this thing right now."

"But then," continued the Squire, turning to Tom, "you might as well let the critter out. I guess he won't git away."

Thereupon Tom opened the little door in the rear of the vehicle and the boy scrambled out into their midst. Upon closer observation he proved to be even a more strange creature than he had appeared in the cage. The motley garb of the clown seemed strangely out of place in the Squire's yard. And, more than that, in the hunted, half-starved face of the boy, there was nothing in keeping with a clown's dress.

Harry looked at him and then ventured the suggestion that the Squire give him to Abe Slocum in payment for the hay.

"No, I'll be derved if ye do," snarled Abe. "I've got two, fool boys now." And, with his pitchfork on his shoulder, he started off on his three mile walk home, saying as he went: "The next circus I go to, I'll stay home."

"So, Uncle," said Ben, laughing, "you don't think the bidding on your legal chattel there will be very heavy?"

"Now, don't laugh," said the Squire, "the more I think of this, the wuss it grows."

"Why, what's the matter now?"

"Well, the law sez I shall keep this critter till I sell 'im, don't it?"

"Yes," answered Ben.

"And fifty years ago, Abraham Lincoln said there should be no more buyin' or sellin' o' human bein's. Now! The law sez I *must* sell 'im and the law sez I *can't* sell 'im. Now, what in thunder *will* I do with 'im?"

Ben turned to Kate and said, "What did I tell you?"

When Betsy saw the frightful possibilities of the case, she cried: "William Tappan, ye ain't a-goin' to keep *this* one, be ye?"

Quick as a flash, the Squire turned on her and, pointing to little Nannie, said: "You kept that one, didn't ye?"

Then, after a moment's pause, he continued imploringly: "But how in thunder am I goin' to help keepin' 'im. The law sez I've got to keep 'im till I sell 'im, an' it sez I *can't* sell him — so, what will I do?"

"Well," said Betsy, flouncing off across the yard, toward the kitchen door, "I kin jest tell ye, he won't git nothin' to eat in *my* house."

The Squire watched her until she disappeared and then said, with a smile: "No, I'll bet he'll jest starve to death right here in the barnyard. Well, Tom," he said, after a pause, "I guess you might as well drive your lionless lion cage into the barn. It will make a fust rate 'hurry-up wagon' fer us."

"Do ye want to put the boy there into it?" asked Tom.

"No," answered the Squire, sorrowfully, "I guess he'll be all right for a while, anyway."

"All right," said Tom, as he drove into the barn.

"Is the show over?" asked Harry.

"Ye-us, I guess that'll be about all fer this time."

"Then I'm going to the depot to see the train come in. Come on down, Ben. You took me down this morning. I'll treat you this time."

Nannie and the boy were standing about twenty feet away from the others as they went their various ways. They had been scrutinizing each other for some minutes. Nannie now ventured to smile. The old man going toward the office, stopped and watched the two children.

Nannie smiled more broadly. Then she spoke.

"What is your name?"

"Chores."

"Just Chores?" asked Nannie.

"Just Chores."

"Where do you live?"

"I don't, m — much!"

"Ain't you got no home?"

"No."

"That's funny. Neither have I."

"I bet we're some relation."

"Well, if you ain't got no home, where do you live?"

"I dunno. I've been with the circus ever since I can remember."

"What do you do with the circus?"

"Most everything but eat and sleep."

The Squire now came over to where the children were talking, and asked: "What wuz ye calculatin' to do here?"

The boy looked at the Squire, blinked once or twice, shifted from one foot to the other, and answered: "I dunno. Nawthin', I guess."

"Well, I've had a house full o' people doin' that fer years. I'm afraid if I git any more at it, there won't be enough to go 'round."

The Squire looked the boy over carefully and said: "Are those all the clothes ye had?"

"Um-um. Don't ye like 'em?"

"Oh, yes, yes," the Squire hastened to reply. "Only they're a leetle ahead o' the styles 'round here. Now, I tell you what you do. As fer as I kin see, I've got to have the pleasure of your society fer thirty days at least, an' I don't see much chance uv ever gittin' rid uv ye. And, while them clothes might be all right to go to church in, on Sunday, they ain't jest the proper style fer workin' round on a farm. You run along over to the house there an' tell Betsy to give you one of the boys' old suits of

clothes. An' say, as we found ye in the lion's den, I guess we'll call ye Daniel. Dannie Lyons is a very good name."

"All right, sir."

The newly christened Dannie went only a few steps, then stopped and considered a moment. Turning to the Squire he asked: "Wull, say, could I git something to eat here, too?"

"I guess you won't starve," was the reply.

"Well, ye know the woman said she wouldn't give me nuthin'."

Little Nannie spoke up with the air of knowledge of an older acquaintanceship: "Oh, don't you worry about her. You just go right up to her and say: 'Please,' an' she'll give you anything you want. Come on. I'll show you."

So, hand in hand, they went in at the old kitchen door, that door that had opened to so many that were poor and oppressed. The Squire stood looking after them, with an air of doubt and worry on his kind old face.

"I think I'll take out a license to run an orphan asylum."

He stood and thought for a moment.

"I wonder if I be as big a fool as Betsy sez I be? Down deep in the bottom of my soul, I know that boy won't never go away from here."

The Squire stood there, in the afternoon sunlight,

with a far away look in his eyes. His cigar had gone out, the old hat was over his eyes. He was honestly provoked at having this boy, a total stranger to them all, saddled upon him. And then other thoughts came to him; thoughts of another boy who was out somewhere, dependent on some one's help, perhaps. The Squire's shoulders went back. The old hat was pushed up from his eyes, and on his face was a smile that made one think of the sunshine.

"I don't keer if I be a fool. Our Will is somewhere out there in the world, an' if he's in want, I hope he finds somebody thet's jest as big a fool as I be."

CHAPTER VI

BEN was awakened by the rattling of pebbles against his window. He rubbed his eyes and looked out, to find that it was hardly daylight. There was the Squire with another handful of pebbles, just ready to throw them.

"What's the matter?" demanded Ben. "Anybody sick?"

"Thought you wuz goin' up to the Lake to-day," said the Squire.

"I am. Of course," said Ben.

"Unless you git up pooty quick, ye ain't. It's half past five now, and the train goes at six thutty."

"All right, I'll be right down. Only you don't need to scare a fellow to death. I wonder if Harry and Kate will be ready."

"I guess so," said the Squire, stooping to look under a branch toward Silver's. "I see the smoke comin' out uv their chimblly, when I fust got up."

"All right. I'll be right down," said Ben, hurriedly starting to dress.

Events had been coming fast and furious for the past week, at least for Bradford. As Harry and Kate were to be there only a week, Ben had kept

everybody rushing. There had been early morning rows on the mill pond for lilies. They had been down to Bradford Pond, fishing. They had driven by day and by night, until Betsy said: " Might jest as well be livin' right on Fifth Avenoo in New York fer the excitement."

The regular, family routine had been completely upset. They were too early for one meal and too late for the next.

Now as a fitting climax to the week's dissipation, the Squire, Ben, Kate and Harry were going up to Lake Sunapee for the day. Ben and the Squire had eulogized Sunapee Lake to such an extent that Kate and Harry were anxious to see if there was really as beautiful a spot on earth as had been described.

Betsy as usual had a huge basket of lunch prepared. Whatever the occasion, this was always Betsy's first care and thought.

Breakfast was hastily disposed of by candlelight and the six-thirty " up-freight " was taken.

From Bradford to Lake Sunapee is ten miles. The road winds and twists its tortuous way into the mountains at a very heavy grade.

The steam launch *Foam*, Captain E. R. Parker, Proprietor, was awaiting them at Lake Station. Captain Parker was an old and weather-beaten seaman. For several years he had plowed the rough waters of Lake Sunapee in fair and foul weather.

That is, if it was not too foul. If it was, he postponed the plowing until it was fair.

The *Foam* was a craft of twenty-six feet over all. The motive power was a tiny, single engine with rheumatic bearings and leaking joints. It was put together with nails, pieces of string, pieces of rubber, garden-hose and profanity.

But — the one thing that distinguished it from the numerous gasoline and naphtha boats with which the lake abounded, was the fact that it went. The gasoline and naphtha boats were the pet aversion of the Captain. He would look at one and begin to swear under his breath, the minute it came into sight, or if he heard the eternal "tut-tut" of the engine, it was not always under his breath. "Us't to be that a pilot needed eyes," he would grunt. "Now all he needs is ears and a nose. Cussed little upstarts. I'd jest as quick think uv runnin' my boat with a bunch uv snap-crackers."

On this morning, none of the offending squadron was in sight, so the Captain was in good humor.

"Hullo, Cap!" shouted the Squire. "How's she p'intin'?" This was the one and only nautical term the Squire knew, and was always his first greeting to the Captain. The Captain reported that she "p'inted nor' by nor' east by nor'," and that all was well, so they steamed away for the four mile run up the lake.

Paradise Island, their destination, lay about half way up the lake, near the eastern shore and was separated from the mainland by a narrow strip of water. This island was, to the Squire and the two boys at least, the most charming and fascinating spot on earth. The woodsman's ax had never reached it. The entire island was covered with towering pines and spruces, while here and there a white birch gleamed and glistened among the darker foliage or swayed with the breeze, like a white virgin of the forest hiding behind the other trees. Here, years before, the Indian had pitched his wigwam. He had lain beneath these same pines at night and watched his camp fires glimmer and sparkle, as if trying to out-sparkle the reflection of the stars in the rippling waters below.

In this same little cove, he had drawn his canoe out upon the white sands. From these same rocks he had fished. These birches had furnished him with bark to build his canoe. The pines had yielded the pitch with which to make it watertight.

But the Indian had been gone for many moons and Lake Sunapee had, for a hundred years, slumbered with a slumber from which it was, in a few years, to be awakened, by the oncoming of a mighty army of summer home-seekers.

On this bright morning, the waters of the lake lay

whatever might support life, and when it did not find the support near at hand, it did not stop and give up the search. It simply kept on going. At last, after crawling across the top of the rock and down the side, it reached the rich, moist earth and to-day, despite its bad start and despite the discouraging surroundings, it stood, the biggest tree on the island, a monument to what perseverance can do.

Ben helped Kate to clamber to the top of this rock and they stood there silent for a moment, looking up at the grand old tree. Then Kate drew a long breath and looked off over the water. "Ben," she said, "this is nearer Heaven than I ever expected to get, in this world." She looked about her. The summer breeze stirred the branches above them into the softest possible murmur. Down in the still pools at the base of the big rock, the fishes could be seen, swimming lazily. On a branch above her, high beyond her reach, a squirrel sat with its tail saucily thrown over his shoulder, and told them, in wood language, what he thought of them. Kate threw her head back rebelliously. "Oh, I don't want to ever see a city again," she cried.

Ben laughed, half sadly. "That is only because this is a novelty to you," he said. "You would soon tire of it."

"No," Kate replied, "I really should like to live here. Although," she continued, looking

fearlessly at Ben, "it might make some difference who was here."

Ben started. "Kate, I —"

Kate grasped his arm fearfully. "My goodness, don't jump like that. You will have us both in the lake if you are not careful."

Ben flushed to the roots of his hair. For an instant he started to clasp her to him, but then, suddenly drew himself away.

"Oh, Kate, don't," he cried. "Don't joke. Can't you see what a miserable position I am in, without making it any harder?"

"Your position?" Kate cried. "Why! I am nearer to the edge than you are."

"Nearer to the edge?" said Ben bitterly. "Nearer to the edge? Why, I am over the edge. I am a million miles over the edge, and still falling. I am falling farther and farther in love with you every moment. Oh! why didn't I stay here; here where I belonged; here where, perhaps, some day I could have been satisfied; here where I had at least a chance of being equal to the rest? But no, I had to go over the edge, as I have been going, ever since. I had to go to the city; go among those so far above me that no matter what I may do, I can never rise to their level. Fool that I was — fool that I am — fool that I always will be."

Through all this outburst, the longest speech

she had ever heard Ben make, Kate stood listening, with her eyes fastened on the clear waters below. The color which had receded from her face at first, came back slowly and mounted to her cheek in a rich flood.

Kate Gordon was young, rich, willful and beautiful, in a rich, dark, gypsy style of beauty. She was perfectly aware that she was comparatively, a rich woman, and that Ben was poor, but being a wholesome American girl, this had not the slightest effect on her. She had, unreservedly, given her heart to this young fellow and was perfectly willing to bestow her hand with it, but if she could forget the difference that a hundred thousand dollars make, Ben could not. Kate knew, unless some strong influence could be brought to bear on him, that things would go on as they were going, for years. For a week she had been trying to find that influence. She knew that Ben had rugged integrity, a determined insistence that was bound to win in time. And if it was in her power, she did not intend to spend the best years of her life waiting for that time. Now, at last, she had brought the subject to the front, nor did she feel unmaidenly in doing so.

She raised her eyes to his face. He was looking morbidly off across the water. She looked at him for a moment, then threw back her head and set

her teeth defiantly, for she knew the young man was not only fighting her, but himself.

"So!" she said, "You think you are a fool, do you?"

"No," he answered, "I don't *think*. I *know* I am."

"Do you know," Kate continued, half angrily, "I think you are foolish, but not a fool."

Ben made no answer, and, after a pause, she continued in a lower tone: "Would you mind telling me just what your plans are, Ben?"

"Plans?" and Ben turned desperately. "Plans? What plans *can* I have?"

"Then," said Kate in her cool, even voice, "will you kindly tell me what you expect *me* to do?"

Ben thought for a moment, then answered moodily: "Well, about the only thing I can see for you to do is to get nice and poor."

"But, Ben, my money won't lose itself."

"Well, then," Ben went on desperately, "I simply cannot go to your father and ask him to hand his only daughter over to the tender mercies of an eighteen-dollar-a-week clerk in his own employ."

Kate glanced up at him with a blush. "That is more than he was getting when he married," said she.

"Yes, but he is getting more now," said Ben. "If he were still worrying along on that income I shouldn't hesitate a moment. But when you consider the fact that he has got more thousands than I have dollars and that his daughter has nearly as much more, I can't see him going into any ecstasies over any arguments I might offer."

Kate sighed, thought a moment, then glanced around the island. The sound of clattering dishes showed that the Squire was busy with the dinner. Harry was busy casting his line.

Her teeth came together firmly again. She turned so that she stood directly in front of Ben and forced him to meet her eyes.

"See here, Ben," she said, "we must put an end to this foolishness right here and now. I want you to tell me truthfully and plainly just what your plans are."

"Plans!" and Ben tried to turn away from her, but she took hold of his arm and drew him back, facing her. "What plans can I have? Kate, what is the use of my binding you to an engagement?"

The girl knew that her future happiness was in the balance. She did not know just what to say, nor how to say it, but like a good general, she threw out a skirmish line, and waited to find a vulnerable spot.

"My dear boy," she said in a bantering tone,

"there seems to be one thing in all this that you overlook. It is generally conceded, I believe, that, while it is a man's privilege to *ask* this question, it is the one, sole privilege a woman is permitted to enjoy in this vale of tears, to *answer* that question. Now, if I remember rightly, one moonlight night, last August, you asked me to be your wife at some distant day. My recollection is correct?"

Ben nodded slowly.

Kate smiled. "I thought I remembered. Now, 'according to the above law, so quoted,' as the Squire would say, your part of the proceedings is ended. Now comes my part." She stopped and pondered for a moment. "If I had good judgment I should probably say: 'No.'"

Ben nodded his head dismally. "That's right."

"But," continued Kate, "being only a foolish woman, and loving you dearly, I have said: 'Yes.' And —" she continued, laughing and blushing, "I don't just see how you can retract.

"And now," she continued more seriously, "the facts in the case being settled according to the present fashionable code, the next question which naturally arises, is — when?"

Ben looked at her curiously a moment, then he said, "when what?"

"When are we going to marry?"

It seemed to Kate as though she had done all she

could to make this foolish boy see how perfectly willing she was to share his poverty, if he would not consent to the sharing of her wealth. For a moment she hesitated, and then went on:

"Ben, you are making this pretty hard for me. You are making me say and do things that a woman should not do. But I am not going to let this, our chance of happiness, slip by. We have known each other two years. In those two years, we have learned to love each other. You have asked me to marry you and I have promised to do so, but just because I have a little more money than you, you say: 'Wait.' Wait for what? Wait for your bank account to catch up with mine? Do you think love is measured by bank accounts?"

"No," exclaimed Ben. "But you can't expect me to live on your money, can you?"

"No," said Kate quickly, "but you can let me live on yours."

"Eighteen dollars a week!" groaned Ben.

"You make more than half the contracts in the office now, don't you?" said Kate.

"Yes, I make a good many."

"And every good contract you make puts us farther apart; makes me richer."

"But what can I do?" asked Ben despairingly.

"You can forget your pride. You can forget that I have more than you. You can forget every-

thing, except that you love me. You can let me prove that I love you by becoming your true and loyal wife. You can let me help you."

Ben's eyes began to grow bright. "Now, right now?"

"Yes, now!"

Ben's breath came in gasps. At last he said:

"Do you mean to say that you would marry me to-day? That you will be content to marry me now and wait? Wait until I am in a position to declare our marriage to the world and say this is my wife? Can you? Will you do this, Kate?"

Slowly Kate bowed her head. "Yes," she whispered.

"There is a train to Concord at eight o'clock," Ben went on, the words coming in a perfect torrent. "We can go there to-morrow night, get married and be back by midnight. Will you do it? Will you, Kate?"

Again came the whisper: "Yes."

"And Kate," continued Ben, bending his head to look into her eyes, "will you solemnly promise never to tell a living soul that you are my wife, until I give you permission?"

Kate looked up at him quickly. For a moment she looked into his eyes, then asked, with a sigh: "Do you think it is best that way, Ben?"

"It is the only way," said Ben. "I couldn't stand being called a fortune hunter."

The girl looked into his eyes earnestly for a moment, then she placed her hands in his, smiled and said: "Ben, I promise."

For a moment Ben stood looking deep into her eyes, dear eyes they were, tender and true, then he clasped her in his arms, saying brokenly, "Oh, Kate, dear, Kate, dear! I know I oughtn't to let you do this, but I love you so, I love you so. And if a life of love and devotion and hard work can make up to you what I lack, I will make you happy."

The fishes down below looked up, and the squirrels up above looked down. The Squire had come out from his cloud of smoke for a breath of air. He looked at them in amazement. For a moment he gasped, then, going back into the smoke, he called:

"Ben! Dinner's ready."

CHAPTER VII

ON the night following the trip to the Lake, Ben slept but little. Until nearly daylight, he tossed and turned and studied and thought. A dozen times, he made up his mind that it would be wrong to fulfill his agreement and a dozen times his love for Kate triumphed. He continually thought of what the world would say. He could see himself pointed out as the husband of the rich Miss Gordon. Then Kate's clear, gray eyes would look at him so sorrowfully that his determination would weaken and he would start all over again, planning and scheming.

When morning came, he was in a condition where the slightest trifle would have turned him either way.

Just before the time for the Concord train, Kate had gone to change her dress. Ben was sitting in the Squire's old armchair, trying to figure out whether he was glad or sorry. He had been there perhaps five minutes when he heard a familiar, bird-like warble. It was Will's whistle. Since childhood, it had been their signal. He started to his feet, and looked in the direction from whence

the sound came. It was from somewhere down the road. Ben ran to the gate and looked up and down, but there was no one in sight. He answered the whistle, and, hearing a rustle behind him, turned, and there was Will's head just emerging from behind a syringa bush. Ben started toward him, but Will held up a warning finger, and peered around anxiously.

"Are you alone?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Ben. "Come out of there." He shook both of Will's hands, looking him over from head to foot. "Where did you come from?"

"I came from Boston, and I came by freight, too," said Will, still looking curiously around him.

"I wouldn't care if you came by balloon," said Ben, delightedly. "Come into the house."

He started to drag him toward the house. Will held back.

"No! No!" he said. "I don't want the folks to know that I am here at all."

Ben stopped and drew back a step. "Why not?"

For the first time, Ben began to notice Will's appearance. At the first glance, he had looked the same as always, but as Ben looked closer, he felt troubled. He couldn't have told just wherein the change lay, but there was a change. In the first

place, the healthy, country coloring was gone, and in its place had come an unhealthy sallowness. A flashy necktie entirely covered what might be a clean shirt bosom, or might not. There was a general air of rakishness about him that troubled Ben, without his knowing exactly why.

"Will," he continued, "this isn't right."

"Did you ever see me do anything in your life that *was* right?" asked Will angrily. "You are the little 'do-right boy.' I am the horrid example."

"Never mind," Ben continued, eagerly, "you can do right now. You know how the folks have worried about you."

"Well, they'll have to keep on worrying for awhile. I have told them a hundred times that I would never come home until they could be proud of me. And do you see anything about me just at present to be proud of? A first class prodigal son, ain't I?"

"Will, it's nothing to be ashamed of — not having money."

"I am ashamed of it just the same," said Will. "Me, the boy that was going to come home to build a new house for the old people. Can you see the house I would build just now? Don't you worry though, but what I will have the dough some day, Ben," and he looked around to make sure they were

not observed. "Ben, I have got something good at last and I am going to let you in on it." He stood back with his hands in his pockets regarding Ben triumphantly.

"What!" said Ben, dryly. "Again?"

"This is on the level. I have got something good," said Will indignantly, "something that is going to make us all rich. Look here." He punctuated his remarks by tapping with his forefinger on Ben's chest. "When I do get this dough, I'm coming back here, and I'll make that little mother of ours the happiest woman in Merrimac County. And Uncle Bill—I'll buy that blessed old clarinet for him, with gold trimmings. Here is the scheme."

Will cautiously drew a package of imposing looking papers from an inside pocket. He selected one of them and handed it to Ben.

"There," he said, "look at that. See what it is."

Ben opened the paper and glanced at it. It was printed in red and green ink, and had an elaborately embossed seal.

"See what it is?" asked Will.

"Why, yes," said Ben, "it is a certificate of stock in the Plunger Gold Mine, of Leadville, Colorado."

"Yes, sir," replied Will proudly, "and it's mine. And these are mine, too," holding up a package

of papers. "I own the whole blamed shooting match."

"You do?" asked Ben.

"Yes, sir, that's what I do," answered Will.

Ben laughed. "It must be quite a valuable piece of property. Where did you get it?"

"Where do you suppose I got it?" asked Will angrily. "I suppose you are the only one that ever gets anything, or who does anything."

"Now see here, Will," said Ben, without paying attention to his anger, "you must admit it looks rather peculiar, to say the least, for a man to be riding around on freight trains with a pocket full of mining stocks."

"I guess that's right, too," said Will apologetically. "Well, I'll tell you how I got it. Sit down."

They sat down on the rustic seat, by the Squire's office, and Will continued.

"This mine was staked out by a couple of young fellows who got fired from college. They didn't want their folks to know they were in trouble, so they went West. It wasn't long before their money gave out. They were in Denver when they saw the finish coming and everybody there had gold fever. Leadville happened to be the nearest point and the smallest fare. They went up there and staked out a claim. Of course by the time they got there

all the best claims had been taken up, so they were away out in the woods with their claim. They worked on it for a few days, but everybody discouraged them, telling them there was no gold that far out. They gave it up and came back to Boston again. It was about this time that I became acquainted with them. You know, misery likes company. Well, they didn't know what to do. Finally, one of them had a bright idea. They had a friend in the printing business there, so they went to him and had him print a lot of these shares. Then they opened an office and started in to unload them on the credulous. I was the office boy. Can't you see me as an office boy? Well, there was only one thing wrong with their plan. The fish wouldn't bite. It began to look as though we would have to take a club or go out and drag them in. But, just as things were looking their worst, a dignified old gentleman came puffing into the office one morning. He proved to be the father of the boys. He didn't feel nearly as bad about the college affair as they had thought he would. I really believe he thought it was kind of interesting. Anyway, there was a regular family reunion, then and there. He took the boys home with him. My wages were still to come and they wanted to know if I would take the mine. It was that or nothing, so I took it. I was right when I told you I was the bloated pos-

sector of The Plunger Gold Mine, of Leadville, Colorado, U. S. A."

Ben sighed with relief. After a moment's pause, he inquired, "What are you going to do with it now you have it?"

"I am going out there, and if there is any gold between the top of that mine and China, I am going to have it," said Will determinedly.

"But how are you going to get out there?" asked Ben.

"Ah," said Will, placing his forefinger against Ben's breast, "there's where you come in. This is a business proposition. I am going to sell you ten shares in this mine."

Ben turned and looked at him laughingly. "You *think* you are."

Will came closer and spoke more earnestly. "Now, see here, Ben. I know I have been an infernal nuisance to you and the folks. But I am going to quit fooling, and get down to work. I have been down in the 'lowlands' for a year, and I am now going to strike for the 'high ground.' I have known what it is to go hungry and be cold. I have seen my clothes go, piece by piece, to relieve the wants of the inner man, and I have come to know that I am on the wrong track. I am not made for city life. I am no fool, but my abilities do not lie in that direction. Now I know that these shares

are not worth a basket of rabbit tracks — now. But some day they may be. And I want only enough to get out there. There is gold in that country somewhere, and why shouldn't I be the one to find it, as well as the other fellow? These fellows didn't go down into the land any; they just scratched around on the surface. And they wouldn't have known a piece of gold if they had met it walking up Main Street. Another thing, Ben, that ought to appeal to you: I will give you my solemn word of honor that if I don't win out this time, I will never bother you again as long as I live. If I can't do anything else with that mine, I will crawl into it, and pull the hole in after me, and die there."

All through this Ben had stood listening and watching. He had never heard Will speak so earnestly before. Perhaps, after all, he was right. Perhaps, away from the city and its temptations, he might do better. He might succeed. Ben knew there was no hope of the mine — he never gave that a second thought — but perhaps that wild, Western mode of living would be more in Will's way. It might make a man of him.

Will stood watching him eagerly. Finally Ben said, without looking up, "How much do you want?"

"Two fifty."

"Two fifty what?" rejoined Ben quickly.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars," answered Will.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars to go to Leadville, Colorado? How are you going? In a special train?" asked Ben.

"No —" and Will hesitated, "but — well — I have got a partner."

"A partner? What is he? The financial end of it?"

"Financial end of it?" said Will in disgust. "He is worse off than I am, if anything. I will introduce him."

Will went up to the gate and called softly to a young man who was leaning jauntily against a tree, at the edge of the sidewalk, further down the street. "Hey, Jim. Come here."

Jim came in at the gate and Will led him over to Ben and introduced them. Two years before this time, Ben would have felt highly honored at meeting a gentleman of Jim's appearance. But a year in New York had made him a little skeptical of gentlemen who wore silk hats, damaged pink shirts, and rhinestones.

"Will tells me," Ben said, "that you and he are contemplating a business venture."

"Yes," said Jim, with a studied yawn, "we thought we might turn a few millions. You see,

us capitalists have to have a little excitement, once in a while."

Will hustled forward again, fearing that Jim's light and airy way might not have the proper effect on Ben.

"Now, Jim," he said, "you just keep watch there at the gate and see that we are not interrupted and Ben and I will settle up this business."

"All right, pard," said Jim easily. "I'll watch. And I'll shoot the first guy that butts in." He took up his stand near the gate, leaning back gracefully on his elbow, legs crossed, and hat over his eyes.

Will turned to Ben. "Well?" he said, inquiringly.

Ben sighed. "Well, what is it I am to do?"

Will held out the papers. "Buy these ten shares in my mine, Ben. If I win, you win. If I lose, you win just the same, for you get rid of me forever."

Ben studied a moment, then he looked up.

"Will," he said, "you know I can't afford this."

"But isn't it worth two fifty to be rid of me?" Ben did not answer, and Will went on excitedly. "Ben, for God's sake, let me have this money and let me get away from here. Look at this thing right, will you? I want you to consider that you are investing this money in me — not in the mine.

It will give me a chance to get out there in the country where I belong. I don't belong here, and I know it. I can't stand this steady, plodding grind the way you can. I must be out somewhere. Out where there is room to breathe; to expand; to grow. Let me have the money, Ben. You will win in the long run. Please, Ben."

Ben had watched Will closely. After he had stopped speaking, the two boys stood looking straight into each other's eyes for a moment. Then Ben slowly nodded.

"All right, Will," he said. "I don't consider your mine worth wasting breath on, but if you think you will be so much better off out there, I will let you have the money. Only, when you *are* out there, Will, remember that back here in New Hampshire, there is a dear, old mother, and the best, old uncle two boys ever had, who are living on in the hope of seeing the honors you and I are going to earn in the world. Perhaps we can't earn riches, but we can live pure, clean lives. And I think that will please them more than the riches. You'll remember that, won't you, Will?"

"Ben I —" Will started all right, but a lump came in his throat that caused him to stop and hastily turn away. He took a step or two, then turned back impatiently. "Oh! Blazes! what's the use of my talking. I've been talking all my life. Now

I'm going to do something. You just wait and see."

"All right, all right," said Ben, as he turned away, embarrassed but delighted at Will's earnestness, "I'll write you out a check." He took a step or two toward the little rustic table that stood by the Squire's office, then stopped and drew his check-book from his pocket. He sighed and seated himself at the little table, and taking his fountain pen proceeded to make out a check for two hundred and fifty dollars.

As he wrote, Will came to the back of his chair and watched him. Twice he tried to speak before the words would come. Then in a broken voice he said: "Ben, I know what this means to you. I know how hard you have worked and saved for that money. And if there is any gold in that mine I am going to have it. I'll make you folks proud of me yet."

"Why, of course you will," said Ben heartily, as he rose and handed Will the check, "and there is the capital to start with."

Will looked at the check for a moment, although a kind of dimness of vision interfered with his view, then he looked up at Ben with a bitter smile. "And what will I do with this?" he asked.

"Why, cash it, of course," said Ben.

"Yes," said Will, with a hard laugh. "Can you

see anybody cashing a check for two hundred and fifty dollars for me?" He looked down at himself disgustedly.

"Why, that's all right," said Ben. "Don't you see, I have made it payable to 'bearer'? But hold on. I can beat that. I'll get Uncle Bill to indorse it. Everybody in New Hampshire knows his signature and you can cash it anywhere. Wait here and I'll run over to the court room and get him to fix it."

"But say," Will called after him, as he started toward the gate, "he isn't going to know this is for me, is he?"

"No. I will simply ask him to indorse it for me. I won't answer any questions."

"All right," said Will, sighing. Ben went on his way to the court room.

In five minutes Ben was back with the check, duly indorsed by the Squire. He placed it in Will's hands, saying: "There you are my future mining king. And Uncle Bill says that if we want the cash, Silas Dalby will be glad to cash it, for he sold some land yesterday and will be glad to turn some of the cash into checks. And now, if you are in earnest about not meeting the Squire, you will have to be going, for he is coming home in a few minutes."

Will took the check, looked at it a moment, then

briskly drew out the bundle of "shares," counted off ten and placed them in Ben's hands. "There are your ten shares in The Plunger, my boy."

"All right," said Ben, laughing. "I will treasure them carefully and wait anxiously for dividends."

Will held out his hand and Ben grasped it heartily.

"Good-by, Ben!"

"Good-by, Will!"

"Ben, I am going to win this time."

"I hope so, Will."

"Good-by."

"Good-by." And joining Jim, Will went out through the gate and down the road. As soon as they were out of sight, Jim stopped. "Let's have a peek at the firm's capital," he said. Will handed him the check. Jim examined it. "Um! Made out to 'bearer,' eh? Now see here, pardner, you don't want these guys around here to know you are here, do you?" Will shook his head sadly. "Well, then, why don't I cash this thing? It's made out payable to 'bearer,' and I can be just as good a 'bearer' as you can, can't I?"

"Oh, I don't care. Go ahead. I don't care what you do."

"All right, pardner. You duck through this guy's yard and go down by the freight depot and

wait for me. I'll go and get the long green and you meet me there."

"Suit yourself," said Will wearily. He went through a dooryard and over the garden fence, then down the railroad track to the depot.

Jim watched him out of sight, then took the check from his pocket and looked it over carefully. He turned and sauntered back toward the Squire's office. Reaching the gate, he peered about to see that he was unobserved, then stepped softly to the small table where Ben had written the check. He looked around again, then picked up the fountain pen which Ben had left there. Giving the pen a flirt to start the ink flowing, Jim tried it on his thumb-nail. It was filled with a peculiar colored ink that was used in the New York office. Jim compared the drop on his thumbnail with the ink on the check. Again he looked all about, then quickly seated himself at the small table and worked in a business-like way for a few seconds. Then he waved the check in the air to dry it, laid the pen back in the position where he had found it, and sauntered to the gate. "There!" he said softly to himself, "I guess that will help some." Setting his hat firmly on his head, he passed out of sight, on his way toward Silas Dalby's store. Ben was walking toward the courthouse and met Silas Dalby driving back toward the store.

He hailed him. Silas, with much apparent effort managed to stop his horse. Ben stepped up to the wheel and making sure he was not overheard, said: "Mr. Dalby, I have taken the liberty of sending a — er — a friend of mine to you with a check to cash."

"Well," said Silas, drawing back cautiously, "I don't care much about cashing checks fer strangers."

Ben laughed. "You will find this one is all right, I guess. It is signed by myself and endorsed by the Squire."

"Oh, well," said Silas, "ef the Squire has endorsed it, I guess it's all right." He prepared to drive on.

"And say, Mr. Dalby," Ben came closer, "will you do me another favor? Don't tell any one, not even Uncle Bill, who cashes it, or how much it is for."

Silas thought a minute, then asked suspiciously: "What's the matter with it?"

"Not a thing," Ben hastened to assure him. "It is only that I — that we don't want it known that — er — the party cashing it is here or that I am paying him money."

"Well, all right," said Silas, gathering up the reins and preparing to drive on. "I d'know as it is any of my business, as long as the check is all

right, an' I guess it is with your name and the Squire's on it." He drove on.

A half hour later as the Squire came in the gate, he met Ben coming out with an overcoat on his arm.

"What's the matter?" the Squire inquired, "Are ye cold?" The Squire pointed to the coat.

Ben looked down at the coat, at loss for an answer.

"Why — er, no. I — you see, I thought I would take a little ride, and you know how cold the night air is."

"Yes," replied the Squire, "you want to look out for the cold night air in June." After a pause he continued, "Goin' drivin' I s'pose?"

Ben, glad of an excuse, exclaimed quickly, "Yes, that's it. Going driving."

"Ye want to be careful of one thing," said the Squire.

"What is that, Uncle Bill?"

"Be sure to git a one-handed hoss," said the Squire picking up a newspaper and seating himself in the old armchair by the office door.

"All right," replied Ben, laughing, as he went down toward the gate, "I will."

Before reaching the gate, however, he stopped and came back to the Squire. Undecided, he stood for a moment, then he spoke:

"Uncle Bill, I — er — I don't suppose I ought to tell you this, but I am going to."

The Squire looked up curiously and Ben continued.

"I have heard from Will."

The Squire dropped his paper.

"Have ye? How is he?"

"He's all right," answered Ben. "He is — he is going away."

"Going away? He's away now, ain't he? Where's he goin' to now?"

"That is the part I can't tell you, Uncle. I promised him I would not. But he wanted you to know that he was all right."

"He's doin' well, ain't he, Ben?" asked the Squire anxiously.

Ben smiled to himself as he answered, "Oh, yes. The last time I heard from him he was doing very well."

"Don't need money, does he?"

Ben sighed as he answered: "No."

At this moment Kate came to the gate. She was dressed in a neat, traveling dress, with a long coat of gray silk and a big, white straw hat. She stood looking at Ben for a moment, and then said:

"Ben, I want you."

When Ben saw her, he turned to the Squire, saying, "Er — excuse me, Uncle."

"All right," answered the Squire.

Ben opened the gate and passed through. He looked into Kate's eyes and the dear, true light that he saw gleaming in their depths, stole away his last remnant of hesitation.

Kate drew her watch from her belt and held it up, touching Ben's arm, to call his attention. Ben looked at it; then looked back at the Squire, who was watching all this in a puzzled, grave sort of way. Suddenly Ben rushed in through the gate, up to the Squire, and shook his hand violently, exclaiming:

"Good-by, Uncle Bill. Good-by," then tore through the gate, took Kate's arm and hurried down the street.

The Squire slowly rose and went over to the gate, stood leaning against a post and watched them. Then a smile crept over his countenance; that smile that always made you think of the sunshine. And he repeated to himself:

"Ben, I *want* ye."

His countenance grew serious, as he added, "Love's young dream. How few of them last. 'Ben, I want ye.' Bet there ain't nobody sayin' that to poor Will."

He sighed and turning, went toward the office, murmuring, "Never mind, boy, yer mother and yer Uncle Bill want ye, if nobody else does."

Little Nannie had come out of the house with a

pan of apples and was sitting on the seat near the tree, watching the Squire silently. As the Squire smiled, she smiled. Now, as the Squire was about to go into the office, he heard a soft sigh. He had forgotten the child, but turned at once. The little girl sat, big eyed, looking straight ahead, with unseeing eyes. Her lips parted and the Squire heard the words, hardly above a whisper:

"I wish somebody wanted me."

The Squire softly went to her, and, lifting her from her seat without a word, put his arm around her and patted her cheek. The child who was so old, and the old man who was but a child at heart, went across the yard, in the gathering shadows of the summer's night, into the house.

CHAPTER VIII

BEN, Kate and Harry had gone. Kate and Harry on their pilgrimage, up through the White Mountains, and Ben back to New York. Closely pressed to Kate's bosom was a piece of paper which stated that Benjamin William Gould, of Bradford, New Hampshire, was, on the twenty-third day of June, united in the holy bonds of matrimony, to Katheryne Ethel Gordon, of New York, N. Y., by the Rev. John C. Barrows, of Concord, N. H. Locked closely in Ben's heart was the knowledge that he was the happiest, the most miserable, the proudest and the most ashamed young man on earth. Every time he had looked at Kate, he could hardly refrain from yelling at the top of his voice: "She is mine! She belongs to me! She is my wife!"

Then he would think of what her father and her brother would say if they knew the advantage he had taken of her affection. He even doubted what the Squire, his own uncle, would say. His mother, he knew, would stand by him.

And so, with their secret locked safely in their

The Squire looked around this imposing array, sighed and resumed the study of his book.

"Humph! I can't make out from this book whether nails is six cents apiece, or six cents a ton. 'Bout the only thing in the hull store I am sure of is this box of raisins, 'cause here's the bill of 'em. Cost five cents a pound. Silas sez he calc'lates to make twenty-five per cent profit on everything, so I s'pose I'll have to git thirty cents a pound fer 'em."

The Squire stopped, thought a moment, and then gasped, "There! I never thought o' that. S'pose some woman comes in here an' wants some female fixin's. Well, if she does," and he drew a long breath, "if she does, that's where this store closes up till Silas comes back."

A few moments later the door opened. Hulda Slocum came in. Mrs. Abe Slocum, or Hulda Slocum, as she was more commonly called, had been one of the sweetest girls in the village, forty years ago. When she married Abe, everybody wondered why. They still wondered. Abe was not a bad man, but he was mean. Every New Hampshire farmer is close in money affairs — he has to be. He never sees money enough to be otherwise, but Abe was more than close; he was downright mean. Even forty years of his meanness had not been enough to sour Hulda's disposition. She was still the quaint, sunny, little body she was when Betsy

and the Squire went to school with her forty years before.

"W'y how de do, William," she cried cheerfully, as she limped in out of the darkness. A fall down a broken stairway, that Abe could have mended for a dollar or two, had resulted in a broken leg and a slight limp remained.

"Good evenin', Huldy," said the Squire, as he closed the door and placed a chair for her by the stove. "Pooty cold, ain't it?"

"Ye-us 'tis, William," she answered, as she unwound the complicated wraps and mufflers, with which she was swathed. "Abe sez it's the coldest weather he ever see, sence he wuz out in the Black Hills, and, one night out there, it wuz so cold that the teakettle friz up and busted, settin' right on the stove."

"Ye-us," remarked the Squire, "Abe saw some wonderful things out there in the Black Hills."

By this time Abe was stamping and blowing in. He had a lantern in one hand, a butter firkin under his arm, and a basket in the other hand. "Hello, William," he sputtered; "colder'n Greenland's icy mountains, ain't it? Where's Silas?" he continued, looking around.

"Oh, he's takin' a leetle vacation," replied the Squire, as he drew the basket and firkin toward him.

"Who's runnin' the store?"

"Oh, I'm kinder *walkin'* it," the Squire replied. "Silas got a letter last night sayin' as how his brother down to North Weare wuz going to be buried to-day, an' he wanted to go to the funeral. There wa'n't nobody else to run the store, so I told him to go along, an' I would try and hold the store together till he got back."

"I want to know!" said Abe. "Is his brother dead?"

"Well," replied the Squire, "the letter didn't state positively that he wuz dead, but from the fact that they buried him to-day, the evidence kind o' leans that way."

"What did he die of?" Hulda inquired.

The Squire was carefully weighing the butter. Stooping over with his glasses perched on the end of his nose, he was figuring up the weight on the little scales.

"Sarie — bo — spine — al — ma — gin — nis, I b'lieve 'twas," he answered as he straightened up.

"How much of this butter did ye make it, Huldy?" he asked.

"Four pounds and six ounces, I made it," she replied.

"That's right. An' how many eggs is there?"

"Jest four dozen, I b'lieve," answered Hulda.

"How much is eggs, William?" asked Abe.

"I b'lieve the *Mirror* quotes them at twelve

cents," said the Squire picking up the *Mirror* and *Farmer*, which was the never-to-be disputed authority.

"What be ye talkin' about?" demanded Abe. "Trow, up to Newb'ry wuz payin' fourteen cents yistiday. Less see that paper."

He took the paper and looked. "That's right," he said, as he threw the paper back on the counter. "But, by Gosh! If I wuz a hen, I'll be dad-bunged if I'd do it for the money. I s'pose butter's worth about ten cents a ton, ain't it?"

The Squire had picked up the paper and was looking at the butter quotations.

"No. I b'lieve butter's a leetle higher. Ye-us. Butter's twenty-four cents." He laid the paper back on the counter, and began figuring up on a sheet of brown, wrapping paper.

"Well," said Abe, leaning back against the counter, "I'm glad suthin' is worth suthin'. But that jest shows the natural onjustness o' things. A hen can't get but a cent fer layin' a egg, but a cow kin git twenty-four cents fer laying a pound o' butter, an' look at the size uv 'er. How much does it come to, William?"

"Well, less see. Four and a quarter pounds of butter would be a dollar an' twelve cents; an' four dozen eggs would be forty-eight cents. That is jest a dollar an' a half altogether."

"Um," grunted Abe, disgustedly, "That's a mean lot o' money to drive three miles fer. Give me three ten cent pieces o' Farmer's Delight terbacker."

Abe crossed over to the opposite counter, where the tobacco and cigars were kept. The Squire went behind the counter and took down the tobacco.

"An' give me a roll uv checkerberry lozenges, too, William," said Hulda.

Abe turned to her and snarled, "That's right. Go it. Throw yer money away."

"Oh, I dunno as checkerberry lozenges is any wuss 'n terbacker, is it, William?" asked Hulda, good naturedly.

"W'y 'course 'tis," answered Abe quickly. "Terbacker is medicine, hain't it, William? It's a narcotic. We brain-workers have to have it, don't we, William?"

"Ye-us," Hulda calmly answered, taking her candy and going to the counter on the opposite side. "But my brain works on checkerberry lozenges."

"Well," said the Squire, "that makes thirty-one cents. What else do ye want? I've got some mighty nice raisins here."

The Squire went to Hulda and showed her the box of raisins.

"I'd like ter know what ye want o' raisins, this

time o' year," objected Abe. "Tain't Christmas, ner Thanksgivin' is it?"

"No," answered Hulda quickly, "or you'd be full o' cider! How much be they, William?"

"Thirty cents a pound," answered the Squire.

"How much?" exclaimed Hulda surprised.

"Five cents a pound," said the Squire meekly. Then he added to himself, "Silas won't never make twenty-five per cent on them."

"Lordy! I thought you said thirty," said Hulda, "I guess I'll take five pound, as long as they're so cheap."

The Squire weighed them in the scales, saying to himself as he did so, "I may not be makin' money, but I'm certainly doin' business."

"There ain't no worms in' em, is there?" asked Abe.

"Worms," the Squire said indignantly, "I'll give ye ten cents a piece fer all the worms you'll find."

Abe immediately took the box and sat down on a nail keg by the edge of the counter to search for worms.

"Now, wuz there anything else, Huld'y?" asked the Squire.

"Well, now, William, I've got to have some stock-in's," said she.

"There," said the Squire, "I knew it." He turned and began, in a shamed sort of way, to peek

into different boxes on the shelf. "'Bout what size do ye want?" he asked, without turning round.

"Well, now, I declare, I've forgot," she replied. "What size should you think I'd want, William?"

"How in thunder do ye s'pose I know?" the Squire exploded. "Ask him," pointing to Abe.

"Well," said Hulda, "I guess I take about nine and a half."

"What are ye goin' to do with a half a stockin'?" asked the Squire.

"No, no!" exclaimed Hulda, explaining. "I mean number nine and a half."

"Oh," said the Squire, resuming his hunt for the stockings.

"There! There they be," he exclaimed in a few minutes, taking down a box and opening it. After a glance into it, though, he hastily put it back on the shelf, muttering: "Thunder! Them's *he* ones."

A few boxes further on, he came to what were unmistakably *she* ones. They were of that particular style sometimes called, "glad." Hardly a color known to the dyer's art had been omitted. The Squire gingerly took hold of the tops of a pair, and held them up before Hulda's gaze, his own modestly turned away.

"How do them strike ye?" he asked.

"Now them's real nice ones, ain't they, William?"

"I guess they be," the Squire admitted.

Hulda fingered the material in the stockings. "About how high do they come, William?" she inquired.

The Squire gave one agonizing look at the articles in question and turned away again, as he answered weakly:

"Well, I should jedge that would depend suthin' on circumstances."

"I mean how expensive be they?" exclaimed Hulda, half shocked.

"Oh," said the Squire. He looked at the bottom of the box, where was written the cost mark in letters and the price in figures.

"They cost S. O. X., and sell for thirty-seven cents."

Abe looked up from his box of raisins.

"They cost what?" he asked.

"S. O. X.," the Squire replied.

"How much is that?"

"I ain't got the slightest idee," admitted the Squire cheerfully.

"Then how do ye know but what you're sellin' 'em below cost?"

"I don't," said the Squire.

"Then I guess I'll take this pair, and *this* pair," Hulda said.

"All right," said the Squire, laying them to one side. "Anything else?"

"Well, now," said Hulda, thinking for a moment, then leaning forward, as if to speak in a whisper, "I —"

The Squire drew back against the shelves in alarm.

"No, no! We hain't got nuthin' like that."

"Why, Good Lordy! I hain't told ye yet."

"No, an' ye don't have ter," said the Squire. "If it's anything that requires whisperin', ye'll have to wait till Silas gits home."

"Well, then," said Hulda, "I guess that'll be all."

Hulda resumed her seat by the stove and the Squire started to do up her packages.

There was stamping of feet outside, the door opened and Pete Douglass entered with Tom Flinders. Pete had mysteriously disappeared about the time the hard work of harvesting began, and had not been seen since.

"Why, Hullo, Peter. Thought you wuz dead," said the Squire.

"Naw," said Pete, grinning, "me not bin dade. Bin up White Leever Johnson," meaning White River Junction. "Work in meel."

"That so? Seems to me you took a pooty sudden notion, didn't ye? Ye worked one day hayin' and then ye melted away, like the mist afore the mornin' sun. What wuz the trouble?"

Pete looked at Tom and grinned. Then he turned to the Squire and pointed over his shoulder at Tom with his thumb, and said:

"Tarm dere, he try to keel me."

"Kill ye?" asked the Squire, in surprise.

"Oui. With scythe — in dere," and Pete pointed to the calf of his leg.

Tom laughed, and said, "I couldn't stand still an' wait fer ye, could I?" Turning to the Squire, he said, "Ye see, I put Pete in front of me mowin'. I mowed as slow as I could, but he wouldn't cut more'n four inches to a stroke, an' I wuz cuttin' about eight, so, natcherly, I kept gittin' closer an' closer to his heels." Tom laughed again.

Pete nodded his head knowingly.

"Oui! I tank I do ver' much bettaire to work in meel, till hay bin all cut."

Tom arose and went to the cigar counter.

"Oh, that's all right, Pete. Come and have a cigar. Squire, give me a bunch o' them Spanish Fours."

The Squire went to the case.

Tom held one out to Pete. "Come on. Have a smoke."

Pete shook his head. "Naw. I no smoke now," he said.

Tom looked surprised, "Why what's the matter? Hain't got the grip, have ye?"

Pete shook his head. "Naw. Releegion."

"Religion? How long ye had that?" asked Tom.

"Oh, 'bout seex week now."

"Well, well," said Tom. "Ye must be pooty good by this time, Peter."

"Oui. Oui," said Peter. "I so good now, I ready to dead any time. I gooder 'n hell."

"Why, Peter," said Hulda, "ye mustn't swear."

"Oh, that ain't swearin' with him," said the Squire.

"It ain't?" said Hulda surprised.

"No. 'Twould be with most folks, but with Pete it's jest *emphasis*."

For the first time Pete missed Silas.

"Where Silas?" he asked.

"Oh, he's debauchin'," said Abe.

"Yes," said the Squire, "gone to his brother's funeral, down to North Weare."

"Monsieur Dalby, he go dead?" asked Pete.

"Yes," answered the Squire, "he's went dead."

"Who run de store, den?"

The Squire had, during the last few minutes, been trying to do up a lot of wire nails for Abe. The points were sharp, and the Squire had used thin wrapping paper. He was now at his fourth at tempt, and just as Pete asked who was running the store, the paper gave way and the nails began to

drop. The Squire pitched the rest of them angrily into the oat-bin, threw the paper after them and shouted in answer to Pete's inquiry:

"A derved old fool. An' you look here, Abe, ef ye want any nails hereafter, you fetch a tin pail to put 'em in. I'd as lieve try to do up a bundle o' eels."

"You run store, Meestaire Tappan?" asked Pete again, doubtfully.

"Yes, I'm runnin' the store," said the Squire. "What do you want?"

"I can geet wan good suit clothes here, eh?"

"Well," said the Squire, reflectively, "ye kin git a suit. I don't know how good it'll be. You come over here in the clothing department, an' we'll see what Silas has got."

At the further end of one of the counters, Silas kept a nondescript pile of men's garments. Hanging from the wall was a calico curtain. This curtain was tacked to the wall by one corner, and when a customer wished to try on a pair of trousers, Silas would take hold of the opposite corner and hold it up, making a dressing room.

The Squire went over to this corner, followed by Pete, and, in a helpless, aimless sort of way, began to overhaul the stock of men's clothing. After a moment he turned to Pete.

"Say, Peter, what size o' clothes do ye wear?"

"Seex," said Pete.

"Six what?" he asked.

"Seex clo'se."

The Squire looked at him. "Peter," he said, "with you as a buyer, an' me as a seller, I think we shall do well. Now what size pants do ye wear?"

"Seex," said Pete.

"Oh, come here," said the Squire, impatiently. "Git up on this box an' I'll measure ye."

Pete mounted an old soap box, which the Squire moved out on the floor. The Squire then picked up a yard stick, which was lying on the counter, and proceeded to measure Pete. Making him remove his coat, he placed his yard stick horizontally across his stomach, placed his thumb at the end of it, and carefully swung it around him until it came around in front again. He held it up and looked at the figures. "Thirty-four waist measure," he said.

Then he measured the inside of the leg. "Leg measure twenty-eight."

He laid the yard stick down. "Now less see what we got that will fit ye."

He took a pair and started to look at the tag. But the minute Pete saw them, and before the Squire had time to examine the tag, he exclaimed,

"Dere! She's him, Meestaire Tappan. She's him!"

"Wait a minute," said the Squire, as Pete held

out his hands for them. "Le's see what size they be." He looked at the tag. "Waist fifty-eight. Leg fifty-two." They certainly were enormous. He looked at the tag again.

"Well, I snum!" he said. He held them up again. "I guess they must a got two pairs sewed together."

Turning to Pete, he said, "Peter, I'm afraid them won't quite fit ye. An' ye know that this bein' my fust sale in the clothing line, I want to be sure an' git a good fit. Now, here," and he held up another pair, "how do them strike ye?"

These were not of quite so lurid a pattern as the first pair, and Pete, with a regretful look at the first suit, said slowly:

"Oh, she pratty, good wan."

"Go ahead. Try 'em on," said the Squire, tossing them to him, "and I'll pick out a coat that'll fit ye."

He turned to pick out a coat, and was busily looking at the size tags, when a shriek from Hulda caused him to turn in time to hustle Pete into the corner behind the curtain.

"Not out here, ye derved fool. Git into the dressin'-room."

Turning to Abe he said: "Here, Abe, come and hold this up. An' don't drop it, nuther."

The Squire soon had a coat picked out that, ac-

according to tags, would come somewhere near Pete's size. It was a style that would, in all probability, appeal to Pete's rather intense taste, salmon color, cut short, with white buttons as big as silver dollars.

Just as he was laying the coat out on the counter, Pete came from the dressing-room, arrayed in the new trousers. Pete was built in a style of architecture that ran mostly to legs. The trousers ran mostly to waist. In order to strike a good average, he had tightened up his suspenders. The Squire looked at him with admiration on his face, if not in his heart.

"There!" he exclaimed, "looks like a bank president, don't he, Tom?"

"Y-e-u-s," said Tom, doubtfully, "makes him kind o' long waisted, don't ye think?"

"Well, now, I don't know," said the Squire. "Turn 'round, Peter."

Pete turned.

"There, look at that," said the Squire, triumphantly, pointing to his suspenders. "He's got 'em gallused up too high. Come here!"

The Squire let the suspenders out about a foot on each side. Then taking hold of the bottoms of the legs, pulled them down to the floor. He arose, stepped back, and viewed him critically. The bottoms of the trousers legs were now at the proper elevation, but the seat was like that of Huckleberry

Finn's, as described by Mark Twain. It "hung low, and contained nothing."

"There," said the Squire, triumphantly, turning to Tom, "have ye got any fault to find with that?"

"No, no," said Tom, "looks fu'st rate — if ye like 'em! Kind o' looks ter me as if he had crawled into 'em too fer, tho."

"Say, look here," replied the Squire angrily, "ain't I havin' trouble enough without you settin' 'round here blockin' the wheels o' commerce?"

Having silenced Tom, for a minute, he turned and picked up the coat. The minute Pete saw that coat, it was his. That delicate shade of salmon, with those buttons, overcame all defects of fit, style, or price. He held out his arms and the Squire slipped him into it. That shade was there, and the buttons were there. He strutted proudly.

"By gar, Tarm, she good wan, eh?" he said to Tom.

"Um-m — ye-us. Kind o' short in the tail, tho', ain't it?"

"That's the latest fashion," explained the Squire, giving Tom a hard look. "Keeps the tails out o' the snow, Peter."

"How much she be?" demanded Pete.

The Squire figured up the price from the tags.

"Coat, four ninety-eight; vest, one fifty-four; pants, two seventy-nine. Le's see. That makes a

grand total of nine dollars and thirty-one cents. Nine dollars and thirty-one cents for the most stylish suit I ever sold," adding to himself, "and the *only* one."

"Tres bien. Tres bien. I take heem. I —"

He stopped suddenly with his hand on his hip. He stood motionless for a moment, then began to look sharply and suspiciously at each one in the store.

"What's the matter?" asked the Squire.

Pete made no answer, but began to step slowly from one to another, looking closely into their faces.

"What's the matter?" repeated the Squire.

"Tiefs!" said Pete, excitedly. "Dat's was eet iss de matter. Tiefs! Tiefs!"

"It's what?" asked the Squire.

"Tiefs. Tiefs. Some tiefs he stole my monies. You hol' de door, Meestaire Tappan. Yo' let no one go out." He stepped along directly in front of Tom and stood looking at him suspiciously. Tom stood leaning his elbows on the show case. The Squire was looking around the floor for the lost money. Tom stood Pete's suspicious gaze as long as he could, then asked in a suppressed voice: "What ye lookin' at me fer?"

Pete looked at him still harder. "I tank some wan take ma money."

"But what in thunder are ye lookin' at *me* fer?"

"Das all right now, Meestaire," said Pete meaningly.

"No tain't all right, nuther. An' you stop a-lookin' at me, or I'll break yer blamed Dutch neck," growled Tom, to whom all foreigners were Dutch.

"No you won't, nuther," said the Squire, "an' you stop lookin' at him, Peter. Where did ye have that money last?"

"I not have heem las'. I have heem first. Some udder feller geet 'im last," said Pete, looking suspiciously at Tom again.

"Where'd ye carry it?" persisted the Squire.

"Right dere," said Pete, slapping his hip.

The Squire thought a moment, then went over and picked up Pete's old trousers from the counter, felt in the hip pocket and drew out the pocketbook. Pete now shifted his suspicions to Abe, and stood before him, gazing sternly. Abe stood it for a moment or so, and then slowly groped around behind him, until he reached a box of whetstones. He grasped one firmly and was just about to rise from his chair, when the Squire stepped to Pete's side, touched his arm, and held out the old trousers with one hand, and the pocketbook in the other.

Pete looked from one to the other, puzzled at first, then he grasped the pocketbook delightedly.

"By garr!" he exclaimed, "I tink I lose dose

pocketbook. I rudder geeve ten dollare dan lose dat pocketbook, Meestaire Tappan."

"If you had looked at me about a minute longer," said Abe, "ten dollars would never done ye any good."

Pete shoved the pocketbook in his inside pocket and started away.

"Here," said the Squire, "don't fergit that nine dollars an' thirty-one cents, in yer joy."

"Oh, by garr! yes," exclaimed Pete, coming back. He took out a ten dollar bill and looked at it doubtfully. Then he looked at the Squire.

"You kin change 'im, Meestaire Tappan. No?"

"I can change him, Mister Tappan, yes," said the Squire emphatically. "This store is run on a strictly cash basis jest at present. And what's more I've had about all the storekeepin' I need. It's bedtime fer honest folks."

He took the cash from the drawer, counted it, placed it in his red bandana handkerchief, tied it up carefully, shoved it into his trousers pocket, took out his watch, then as they went out he turned down the lights, locked the back and front doors and went down the steps, saying:

"Well, I've done beter 'n I expected. Unless burglars git in to-night and steal the hull store, I'm liable to have some of it left to hand back to Silas to-morrer night."

CHAPTER IX

THE Squire had, in conformity with the law, held the circus cage and its contents, now an established member of the family, for thirty days. Acting as his own auctioneer, he then held the prescribed auction and pleaded for a bid. Zeke Hadley would have made a bid on the cage, for the wheels, but when informed that the bid took in Dannie, he refused. The Squire even offered Abe Slocum five dollars out of his own pocket if he would take Dannie and the cage in settlement of his claim. But even Abe, usually anxious to get a bargain, refused. So, with a resigned air, the Squire accepted the result, which everybody in the village had foreseen and the boy became one of the family.

From the time Will had said good-by in the Squire's dooryard, no one had heard a word from him. Ben had written twice. The Squire had simply told Betsy that Will had gone out West. Ben's usual weekly letter came, full of energy, hope and ambition, but the Squire's nightly visit to the Post Office was in vain except for Ben's letters.

The Squire was the president of the Bradford and Newbury Fair Association, an association which held

the annual Fair each Fall on the fair grounds, between the two towns.

The women displayed their hens, cats, rag carpets and rugs; crazy quilts in the true sense of the word, and the men exhibited enormous pumpkins, apoplectic swine and bet lightly on the races.

The music had always been furnished by the Hillsboro Band, or some other out-of-town organization; but now there was a strong undercurrent of public sentiment setting in, to the end that The Bradford Silver Cornet Band should have the honor and the emolument. The band had been strengthened considerably. Sawtelle's two boys were now big enough and had saved money enough to buy two alto horns and reënforce the band. This made a total of sixteen alto horns in the band. Considering the fact that there were only twenty-four men in the band, this made it one of the strongest bands in the county, at least in the alto line.

The Squire had been a sort of ex-officio member of the band for twenty years. As soon as he should get that clarinet he knew that he would be elected its leader.

The band met for rehearsal every Saturday night, in the old dance hall, over the dining-room at the Tavern. The band had a uniform consisting of a red cap and a red belt. A member would as soon

have thought of coming to rehearsal without his instrument, as without his uniform.

Hip Flitters, the bass drummer, lived three miles away, but his bass drum went home with him every time. If it had come to a point where Hip must decide as to which he cared most for, the drum or his wife, the wife would, in all probability, have taken second place.

So, the inevitable Saturday night picture on the main street would be Hip's wife driving the old white horse into the village, and Hip, sitting in the back of the wagon, holding the bass drum in his lap.

One of the many original drummer boys of Shiloh, and one relic of the War of 1812, played the two small drums. They knew less about music than they did about Greek, but when Meeler, the old leader, looked their way and nodded in a certain way, they had learned to know what it meant.

The cymbal player was young Ike Hubbard, and between him and Hip Flitters there was a never-ending quarrel. Theoretically, young Ike was to bang the cymbals when he saw Hip hit the drum, for Hip claimed that he could read music and played by note. Ike said that Hip was not a thorough musician, and to prove his statement, took the bass drum part of a new piece, one night, and indicated two flats before the music. Hip threatened to leave

the band. He said he had played that bass drum at every gathering of the band, for eighteen years, and had never been asked to play in any other key but "C" before. He stoutly maintained that his drum was a "C" bass drum, and that, in order to play in two flats, one had to have a two-flat drum.

When playing, Hip had a most exasperating way of marking time with his drum stick. He would beat time with it, bringing it near the drum every down beat, but only striking the drum at such beats as were called for by the music. But how was Ike to know when Hip started the drum stick on its downward course whether he was going to hit the drum or stop, an inch from it? As a consequence, in the midst of some quiet strain, there would come an unearthly jangle from the cymbals, and the never-ending argument would begin again.

The bass section consisted of David Dibald, six feet, four; Ichabod Ankimiller, four feet, six; and James Buchanan Falor, who constituted the entire colored population of the town. David and Ichabod officiated behind two tremendous upright tubas, with rotary valves. James Buchanan Falor was the proud possessor of what experts announced to be the first bass horn ever made. It was one of those circular affairs into which the player climbs, as a lady climbs into or out of a skirt. Once on, it rested on the left shoulder, with the big bell pointing forward,

like the mouth of a draft pipe on a steamboat. There was enough metal in it to build a locomotive. When this bass section hit the same note, at the same time, as they sometimes did, it was awe-inspiring.

With the exception of Meeler, the leader, the rest of the band consisted of Alto, or "um tah" horns.

Their favorite selections were baritone, trombone or cornet solos, for the simple reason that, with the exception of Meeler, there was not a man in the band who could play a tune.

But Meeler! Meeler was of a brilliant caliber. He was over sixty, and at one time — years gone by — had been an oboe player in the English army. He was now engaged in the peaceful pursuit of personally conducting a side-hill farm near Henniker. There were thirty-five acres of surface and about two acres of soil, the rest was rock, mostly perpendicular.

He did not shine as a farmer, but when he led the Bradford Silver Cornet Band, with his oboe, he was refulgent. His head was innocent of hair, and also of eyebrows, eyelashes and beard. When he came to Bradford, the zero weather of the winter months had led him to cut off the leg of a stocking and pull it over his head for protection. This was useful, but not ornamental. So during the following Fall, Meeler had one day taken the train for Boston

and upon his return, his head was adorned with a beautiful wig of black, curly locks.

For a few seasons this wig was a great success, but the perspiration of Summer, the rains of the Spring and Fall, and the snow of Winter, gradually faded it to a reddish brown, much resembling an old buffalo robe. It had gradually shrunk, until, instead of curling gracefully about his ears, it rested jauntily on the top of his head like a skull cap, not caring for any close companionship with his ears.

When he blew his nose, his neck would swell, his cheeks would puff out, his face would get red, and vigorous perspiration attested the sincerity of his efforts. The result of this was that the wig was continually slipping over his eyes, or over one ear, sometimes falling off entirely.

The Squire never missed one of these Saturday night rehearsals. He would sit in an easy chair, by the stove, with the clarinet part on his knee, trying to follow the notes, fingering them on a cane, or a piece of broomstick, or even the stove poker. He had not the slightest doubt but that if he could have an instrument placed in his hands, he could, at once, play any piece, however difficult.

The Squire, and the other two selectmen, Silas Dalby and Abe Slocum, were at the hall on this Saturday, as a committee to decide whether the band

was competent to furnish music at the next fair. Some of the men came direct from their farm work in overalls and cowhide boots. Charley Radley came with the smut of the blacksmith's shop. Ed, his brother, came with the white evidences of the grist mill. But each and every one donned the little red cap and belt.

Meeler came in, shook hands with the Squire and said that it was a solemn occasion. The Squire agreed that it was. Meeler went to the old hair trunk in the corner, unlocked it, took out the music, and distributed it. He placed his music rack in position, then drew out a shoe box, on which he stood to overlook the band, and glanced over the assembly. He rapped on the music stand for attention.

"We will now tune up. All sound your A."

He opened his music book, turned the pages undecidedly for a moment, then announced: "We will first play Number Six in the old book."

He looked at the band expectantly. Not a leaf stirred. Each and every man sat looking fixedly at him. Each and every book was open at "Number Six in the old book." They knew, and Meeler knew, that it would be Number Six in the old book. They had begun operations every Saturday night for years by playing that number.

Meeler looked around sharply over the band. Every man had his mouth piece to his lips. Hip Flitters, with one eye on Meeler, and one on the book, held the drum stick poised aloft. Young Ike Hubbard, with both eyes on Hip, held the cymbals far apart, ready to strike when he did. The old tenor drummers had taken a determined grip on their drum sticks and were ready to cut loose.

"Tap! Tap!" Meeler rapped on the music stand. "All ready! Play!"

The two old drummers "rolled off," T-r-r-r-r-r-Umn — Pumm! Then pandemonium broke loose. Meeler squealed the tune on his oboe, an octave higher than it was written. The three bass horns grunted "Umph!" on the first beat of each measure and the sixteen altos came in, "Twat twat — twat twat," on the second and third beats. "Boom! Clang!" went the bass drum and cymbals, and "— Tap Tap — Tap Tap!" answered the small drums. "Twee — dle — wee — dle — wee — dle" "Umph!" "Twat Twat!" "Boom!" "Clang!" "Tap-tap!" "Boom!"

The band wobbled through the first part safely, played a trio, during which, Meeler, by almost superhuman efforts, managed to shut off the cymbals and the small drums for the "pp" passages. He went back to the de Cappel sign and finished with a

tremendous run, a note higher than a piccolo ever dreamed of reaching.

Silas, Abe and the Squire consulted in undertones.

"Pooty dern good, I think," said the Squire.

"Fust rate," said Silas.

The Squire turned to Abe, "What do you think, Abe?" he asked.

"Rotten," said Abe emphatically.

"Oh, git out, you pessimist!" said the Squire disgustedly. "You don't know a cornet solo from Gabriel's trumpet, anyway."

For an hour or more they showed their indisputable claim to the enviable position as "The Official Brass Band of The Bradford & Newbury Fair Association."

Silas, Abe and the Squire retired to the anteroom to discuss the matter. The Squire said it was a good band. He really believed it, too. Silas was sleepy and wanted to go home, so he also admitted that it was a good band.

Abe was still pessimistic, but as long as they must pay money to somebody, and by taking this band it would keep the money in town, he voted: "Aye."

The committee marched back into the hall. There was a breathless silence as the Squire arose.

"Ahem. Gentlemen: On behalf of the Selectmen of the town of Bradford, I am requested to state

that at the next Annual Fair of the Bradford and Newbury Fair Association, the music will be furnished by The Bradford Silver Cornet Band."

There were loud cheers and a general clatter of instruments as The Bradford Silver Cornet Band smiled broadly at their great victory.

CHAPTER X

EVERYBODY within twenty-five miles of Bradford knew the Squire, and whenever you found him he was usually the center of a group. As a general thing, at these gatherings, there was a war of wits. The Squire was widely known as a wit and joker and every local humorist, town-clown and village pest was always anxious for a good-natured tilt with the Squire.

The dwellers of the cities are apt to look down upon country cousins in a pitying way and think them inferior beings, possibly of a lower order of intelligence. But for true, spontaneous wit, not the parrot-like repetition of the quips and jokes we hear in the music halls, or read in the comic sheets, but the quick intelligent grasping of a situation, and the turning of the laugh, by some witty thought, the New England Yankee is unexcelled.

Often, the city chap is ignominiously routed by a simple-appearing countryman with whom he has tried to have sport.

The Squire sat on the piazza of the hotel at Sunapee. Doctor Spratt had followed them from the wharf. Uncle George, the hotel proprietor, was

there, Jake Powell, Captain Parker, Radford, the barber, and two or three of the guests of the hotel. The Squire had combined business and pleasure for a few days, and had brought Betsy up to the island camp with some of the neighbors.

Uncle George had just remarked how bad the season had been for the fruit and garden truck.

"Yes," said Doctor Spratt, "Jim Hoag lost every one of his macaroni bushes."

Jake Powell said that all these troubles were directly traceable to high tariff. "You jest let the Dimicrats git into power, an' git that condemn tariff off an' you'll see this country pick up again, quick enough," said he.

"That's so!" said the Doctor. "I s'pose if 't wan't fer that high tariff, Jake would be about six foot tall."

Jake was about five feet, one, and it was a tender spot with him. He turned to the Doctor with a snarl: "Yes. Well, it's a good thing fer you that there is a high tariff on snuff, or you'd snuff yourself to death."

The Squire was looking at Jake quizzically. "So you think it is the tariff that is the matter, do ye, Jake?"

"No, I don't *think* nuthin' 'bout it," said Jake, "I *know* it is."

"And what Jake knows he knows," said the Squire.

"That an' high taxes," added Captain Parker reflectively.

"Yes, sir," said Jake, emphatically.

"I see," said the Squire, sitting back, crossing his legs and pulling the old hat down over one eye, "High taxes, eh? 'Bout how much wuz your taxes last year, Jake?"

"Well," said Jake, "I don't remember, exactly."

"Well, I do," said the Squire, "fer I made 'em out. They wuz precisely one dollar and twelve cents, an' the Captain's wuz a dollar an' ninety-six cents, an' ye hain't nuther one o' ye paid 'em yit, nor last year's nor the year before."

"Oh, well," said Jake, "I hain't talkin' 'bout myself, pussonally, but the poor man in ginerel. You Republicans are allers doin' all ye kin to throw away money. Look at what ye done right here in this town. Tried to rush through an appropriation to build a new iron fence around the buryin' ground."

"Well," said the Squire, "what's the matter with that?"

"Well, I'd like to know what ye want a fence 'round a buryin' ground fer," sputtered Jake. "Them that's in will never git out, will they? An' I'm dern sure them that's out don't want ter git in."

The Squire laughed. "Well, we didn't build it, did we?"

"No," howled Jake. "An' why didn't ye?"

'Cause we held ye back. We stood like heroes in the breach of the bulworks, an'— n — well, we held ye back." He finished lamely.

"That's so, Jake," admitted the Squire. "You certainly did hold us back. An' that's the best thing ye do. It's all you an' your com-patriots *ever* did." The Squire was getting worked up. "You never had an original idee in yer life. All you fellers ever did do was to wait till we discovered an idee an' then you held back on it. You are a fine lot of hold-backs. An' ye know where ye ginerally find the hold-backs on a hoss, don't ye? They are on the back end, ain't they? An' that's where you be and always have been. On the back end of everything."

The Squire sat back triumphantly.

The Doctor sat silent through this discussion. The Doctor's politics were, like beauty, only skin deep. This gave him a two-fold advantage. In the first place, it saved him the trouble of getting excited. And in the second place, it gave him the chance to put in a shot anywhere he saw an opening, regardless of party. So, taking a pinch of snuff, he remarked:

"Well, I ain't very much of a politician, but I have noticed sometimes, when I wuz teamin', that when I came to a steep hill, the hold-backs wuz about as important as the tugs, if I happen to be goin' down the hill."

"Yes, that's it!" shouted Jake, triumphantly. He had been stuck for an answer and, in his delight at seeing the Squire worsted, forgot his anger against the Doctor for that remark about his height.

"Oh, I guess there ain't nobody disputin' the value of hold-backs," said the Squire, "at the right time, but if you had started out with nuthin' on your hoss but hold-backs, how would ye ever got up on top o' that hill? Ye couldn't back up, could ye?"

"Jake could," answered the Doctor quickly, "that's the only way he would ever git anywhere."

"I'd ruther back up than back down the way you do," growled Jake.

"Well," said the Squire, rising, "you better all back up an' shet up. This country is all right, an' there's money enough in it, too. All ye got to do is to git out an' hustle fer it. If all we poor men wuz to go to work, instead o' sittin' 'round this way talkin' politics, we'd have Rockafeller and Gould an' them fellers in the poor house inside o' ten years. Come on, Dannie, we must be gittin' back."

He started down the steps.

Just at this moment Uncle George came out from the hotel. "William!" he called.

The Squire turned.

"You're wanted on the telephone, William."

The Squire stopped. "Wanted on the telephone!"

What in thunder will I do on a telephone?" he asked.

"No, no," said Uncle George; "somebody wants to speak to ye on it."

The Squire went in to see what was wanted. When he came out, there was a look of dismay on his face.

"Well, dern a telephone, anyway!" he exclaimed. "I allers did hate 'em. What did ye want ter put that dern thing in here fer, anyway?"

"Why, what's the matter, William?" asked Uncle George.

"Well, I jest git up here fer a week's fishin' an' now Tom Flinders sez to come home to onct. Sez there is suthin' turrible happened. Dern fool wouldn't tell what 't wuz, nuther. Well, come on, Dannie. You an' I'll take the night train home ag'in."

They went down the plank walk to the boat, without a word. The Squire looked up the lake toward the fishing grounds. The waters were dancing under just enough of a breeze to make it ideal fishing. The Squire ground his teeth.

"Cuss it. Ef I wuz a swearin' man I should say — Well! I won't say it."

CHAPTER XI

THE Squire and Dannie caught the down train for home. Tom Flinders met them at the depot with a long face. "Where is Betsy?" he asked at once.

"Why, she is up to the Lake," said the Squire. "Where did you s'pose she was?"

"Thought I told ye to bring her with you," said Tom.

"Well, you didn't," said the Squire. "You jest said to come home to onct. There was somethin' the matter."

"Well, I ain't used to talkin' in them blamed machines," said Tom, "an' jest the minute I face 'em I fergit everythin' I ever did know."

"Well, what is the matter?" asked the Squire.

"I d'know what it is," said Tom. "Silas wouldn't tell me what it was."

"Silas?" asked the Squire. "What has *he* got to do with it?"

"Why, he's got the telegram," said Tom.

"What telegram?" The Squire was losing patience.

"Why, there was a telegram come this afternoon

for you," said Tom. "George Mitchell had to go away, so he give it to Silas to give to you, an' told me to telephone you to come down an' git it, as it wuz pretty, ticklish bizness."

"Where's Silas?" demanded the Squire.

"I don't know. Out deliverin' groceries, I guess."

"You start your boots and find him, an' git that telegram, an' bring it up to the office. Dannie an' I will go an' git somethin' to eat."

A half an hour later, when they had finished their meal, the sound of wheels was heard and Abe Slocum's familiar: "Whoa," at the gate.

When the Squire came out from the back room, he exclaimed: "What in the world brings you into town at this time, Abe?"

Abe reached into the inside pocket of his coat and brought out an envelope, yellow and discolored with age. He took a chair and sat back with the envelope in his hand. The Squire placed another chair for Hulda.

"Well, you remember that old desk I bought at the Widder Hadley's auction, don't ye, William?" said Abe.

"Yes. I bid a dollar on it, myself."

Abe thought a moment. "That wuz fifteen years ago, wa'n't it?"

"Pooty nigh," said the Squire reflectively. "She died fourteen years ago last October."

"Yes," replied Abe, "that's what I thought. Well, ye know, we've allers had it settin' in the front room, 'tween the two front winders. I wuz rollin' a barrel o' cider down cellar the other day an' I hit one o' the legs uv it and broke it off. Yis-terday when I wuz tryin' to nail it on ag'in, a piece fell out uv the bottom an' I found a little drawer I never knew nuthin' 'bout afore."

"Well, I swan," said the Squire.

"An' in that little drawer I found this envelope," Abe went on. "It sez on it: 'For William Tappan. To be opened after I am dead.' " Abe studied the envelope a minute, then looked at the Squire. "I don't s'pose there's any doubt about her bein' dead, is there?"

"Well," the Squire replied reflectively, "of course, I couldn't swear to that, but as she has been buried fourteen years, that I kin swear to, the heft o' the proof kind o' leans that way. Le's see it."

He held out his hand. Abe handed him the envelope. The Squire stood looking at it closely.

"It's prob'ly her will. I allers thought there wuz one. I wuz so sure of it, that I've been holdin' on to her property for fourteen years now, hopin' that daughter o' hers would come back and claim it."

Hulda spoke up. "Kind o' funny, wa'n't it, where that daughter uv hern went to."

"Yes, 'twas," said the Squire.

"Yes," Hulda went on. "She jest climbed out o' her bedroom winder one night, an' never wuz heard uv since. I allers claimed she walked in her sleep."

"Well, mebby," answered the Squire. "But if she did, it's gettin' 'bout time fer her ter wake up, an' walk back home ag'in."

Just as the Squire was about to open the envelope, the front gate slammed, and the next minute Tom Flinders came hurrying in.

"There," said he, "I've got the dern thing at last," handing the Squire the long-sought-after telegram.

"Got a telegram?" asked Abe curiously.

"Lord, but I'm skeered 'bout them things," exclaimed Hulda, with a shudder.

"Prob'ly some one's dead," said Abe, soothingly.

"I kind o' 'lowed 'twas from one uv the boys," said Tom.

"Why don't ye open it?" asked Abe.

"Well," said the Squire, "I feel a leetle the way Huldy does about it. It's so seldom I ever git a telegram, that I'm allers a leetle skeered uv 'em."

The moment the Squire had spoken, Dannie

started, put his hand in his pocket, and exclaimed:

"Oh, Gee!"

The Squire turned and looked at him.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I jest thought o' somethin'," said Dannie.

"There," said the Squire, "misfortunes never come single. What wuz it ye thought uv?"

Dannie, in an embarrassed way, pulled a crumpled envelope from his pocket.

"Mr. Dalby give me this letter fer you, yister-day, an — an — I fergot it."

"What'd I tell ye about letters?" asked the Squire.

"Well, Mr. Dalby give it to me," answered Dannie.

The Squire took the letter with a grim smile. "I wish I had two uv you. Then I'd never git anything."

The Squire turned letter and telegram over in an undecided sort of way. A letter and a telegram, coming at the same time, were almost too much for him.

There was silence for a moment, then Abe spoke up: "Well, ain't ye goin' to open yer telegram?"

The Squire turned on him.

"What in thunder have you got to do with this telegram, anyway?"

"Yes, Abe," said Hulda, "ye ought to be

ashamed o' yourself." She got up and started for the door, speaking to the Squire, as she did so. "William, I'm goin' over to the store fer a little shoppin', so I will say good-night. An' Abe, you call and git me on your way home."

"All right," growled Abe, as he slipped over and appropriated the rocking chair she had vacated.

After she had gone, the Squire stood for a moment, undecided as to which he had better open first, the letter or the telegram. Just as he had made up his mind to open the letter, the door opened and Silas Dalby came in.

"How are ye, William?" he said.

"Hello, Silas."

"I see ye got a telegram," continued Silas, as he went over to the stove.

"Well, what uv it?" said the Squire angrily. "Hain't a feller got a right ter git a telegram, if he wants to?"

"Why, yes, yes," said Silas. "I jest thought I'd run over an' see if 'twas any bad news or not. That's all."

The door opened and in marched Hi Sawtell, Zeke Radley and Bill Spivens. The Squire stood gravely looking at them as they marched in and lined up like a platoon of soldiers, back of the table.

"Howdy, Squire, howdy!" said Zeke and Bill cheerfully.

The Squire looked from Abe to Silas, from Silas to Zeke, and from Zeke to Hiram and Bill.

"What is it?" he asked. "A surprise party?"

"No, no," said Zeke. "George wuz jest a-tellin' us a telegram cum fer you, an' we thought — we kind o' thought we'd drop in."

"An' see what 'twas about?" asked the Squire, with a touch of sarcasm.

"Oh, no, no," said Hi, hastily.

"No, no," the others added.

"He ain't even opened it yet," said Abe Slocum.

Just at this moment Dannie touched the Squire's arm and the Squire, turning to see what he wanted, discovered him with a big pair of shears.

"Here's some 'skissers you kin open it with," he said.

"You gittin' anxious, too? Well, I'll open it, but I don't know as I'll tell you fellers what's in it."

The Squire tore off a small corner of the envelope and peeked inside. Each one took a step nearer. There was a breathless silence. The Squire had just inserted his finger in the torn corner to rip open the end, when the door opened and in came Pete Douglass. He closed the door after him, and came to the Squire's side.

"Hello, Meestaire Tappan."

He pointed to the telegram.

"You geet wan dem yeller paper ting on wire, eh?"

The Squire regarded him gravely for a moment. Then he looked about the room. Having completed his survey, the Squire said:

"There. I b'lieve we've got ev'ry able-bodied man in the village here, so I guess I kin git this telegram open without any further assistance. I'll bet ye all know what's in it, anyway."

Amid a deathly stillness, the Squire tore off the end of the envelope, took out the enclosure, opened it, and glanced through it. He gave a slight start, looked up at the others, stepped down to the table, held the message nearer the lamp and read it again. He turned the envelope up and looked at the address again, thought a moment, then shook his head vigorously, as though to make sure he was awake, then read it determinedly a third time.

Every eye in the room was watching him closely. The Squire looked at Tom.

"Tom, come here," he said. "I think I am losing my mind. Read it out loud."

Tom took the paper, held it to the light, and read: "Squire William Tappan, Esq., Bradford, N. H. Will be on eight o'clock train Tuesday with Chaper-o-nee. Meet me. Pauline Biffins."

As Tom finished reading, there was a breathless silence. Then the Squire said in a voice of amazement: "Who?"

For once in his life the Squire was speechless. He looked at the others helplessly.

Abe Slocum was the first to speak.

"Pauline who?"

"Biffins," said Tom.

"Who's Pauline Biffins?" demanded Abe.

"I'll be gosh darned ef I know," groaned the Squire.

Abe looked around at the others, grinned and said meaningly: "Oh, you git out."

There was a burst of laughter and the Squire turned on them angrily.

"What are ye laffin' at?" he blurted. "I don't know."

Abe turned to Hiram and Zeke.

"Ye know what I told ye, when he went down to Boston last fall an' stayed two days an' a night?" Abe shook his head knowingly.

"Oh, you derved old fool, you!" said the Squire disgustedly, as he took the telegram from Tom and looked it over again; "I never heard of Pauline Biffins in my life. The only Biffins I ever knew was Bill Biffins that went to Coloradie some twenty odd years ago."

"Oh, yes," said Dannie, suddenly.

The Squire jumped and turned to him: "Lord, I wish you wouldn't do that. Every time you speak now, I expect something wuss goin' to happen. What's the matter? Did ye fergit something else?"

"No, sir," said Dannie, in an injured tone, "I remembered something."

"What is it?" asked the Squire.

Dannie pointed to the Squire's left hand which still held the crumpled letter the boy had discovered in his pocket.

"There's somethin' on that letter there 'bout Coloradie."

"There is?"

"Yes, sir. I heard the man in the Post Office say so," said Dannie.

"That's right," said the Squire, who was looking closely at the postmark. "It's from Leadville, Coloradie."

"Perhaps it's from that Biffins feller ye wuz talkin' about, that went out there," said Tom.

"Well," said the Squire sighing, "we'll see. Abe, git up an' let me set down there. I'm gittin' too weak to stand."

Abe arose and joined Silas by the stove. The Squire sat down at the table, opened the letter, looked at the signature, glanced up and nodded slowly to those about him.

"That's it. That's who 'tis. Bill Biffins."

The Squire began to read the letter. Dannie had now come beside the table and stood thinking for a moment; then, with his head cocked on one side, he said:

"Say, Mister Tappan, who is Bill Biffins?"

"He's Bill Biffins. That's who he is. Now you keep still."

"Yes, sir," replied Dannie obediently.

"I guess I might as well read this out loud," said the Squire, "I'd have to tell ye all about it, anyway." He read the letter.

"'Mr. Squire William Tappan, Bradford, N. H. Dear Pard. You did not think when you let me have that hundred dollars, that you would ever hear from me again, did ye?'"

The Squire looked at those around him, smiled and said: "That's right. I didn't." Then turning to the letter, he continued reading.

"'But, now, when I find myself dyin' in this awful country, I send to you my all, my little baby gal, Pauline.'"

The Squire sank back in his chair and gasped. "There! I knew it. I knew it. The wust has come."

For a moment he read silently, while the others about him were breathless with curiosity, then he went back and began to read aloud again:

" 'She ain't got no mother. She ain't got no money. She ain't got nuthin' and ther' ain't a soul on earth that I know of but you to send her to. So, as you hope for happiness in this world or forgiveness in the next, take in my little Pauline and care for her.' "

The Squire stopped for a moment, dazed and speechless.

"What's that?" said Tom. "This Pauline is a baby?"

"A little baby gal," said the Squire.

"Let me see that telegram," said Tom.

The Squire handed it to him. Tom looked at it closely for a moment, then held it to the Squire, pointing to the signature. "There. Look at that. Did ye ever see a baby that could write a hand like that?"

The Squire took it from him. "You dern fool, you. The baby didn't write that. That's George Mitchell's writin'. The chaper-o-nee woman prob'ly sent it, fer the baby."

The Squire sat overpowered for a minute. Not a word was spoken. The others stood silently watching him. Finally he looked up at Silas and Abe. Then excitedly waving the telegram, he said:

"An' now here's this telegram sayin' she's comin' on that eight o'clock train to-night." Turning to

Dannie he inquired, "Dannie, what time is it gettin' to be?"

Dannie went to the window, shaded his eyes with his hand, and looked at the town clock. "It's just a quarter past twelve by the town clock."

The Squire studied a moment. "Quarter past twelve by the town clock? That means it's ten minutes to eight."

"What are ye goin' to do about it, Squire?" asked Tom, curiously.

"Why, I don't see as there's but one thing to do," answered the Squire, rising with a sigh. "Some o' you fellers will have to go over an' git the baby, an' bring her up here, while I git ready fer 'er."

"Ye ain't a-goin' to bring her here, be ye?" asked Tom aghast.

"Well, what *am* I goin' to do with her? You fellers are great at asking questions. Why don't some of ye answer some of 'em? What *will* I do with her?"

There was a moment's pause, then Silas Dalby suggested, "Well, there's the Poor Farm, ye know."

"Yes," said the Squire, "an' there's the freight depot, but ye can't put a baby in it, can ye? Did ye see anything in that letter about sendin' that baby to a Poor Farm? It sez he is sendin' her to me, don't it?"

This seemed unanswerable, but Abe Slocum asked, "How be ye goin' to take keer of a baby?"

"I don't know how I be, but I be! Now the fust thing to do is to git Betsy back. Of course this had to happen when she wuz away. Tom, you go over an' git Deck Butman's hoss, an' start fer Sunapee Lake, an' tell Betsy Gould if she ever wants to see her beloved brother ag'in, to come home a-flyin'!"

"All right, Squire," said Tom, starting for the door. "Some o' you fellers better come an' help me hitch up. Deck's hoss is pooty lively after dark."

Hi Sawtell immediately joined him. "We'll help ye. Come on fellers. I want to git over to the depot, anyway, an' git a peek at this baby."

"So do I," said Zeke.

"An' me, too," said Bill.

The Squire was now getting his bearings again, and turned briskly to Abe. "Go over to Hep Saunders's an' git some more milk. Tell him to let ye have another can, an' I'll send it back in the mornin' early. I'll prob'ly be up all night, anyway. Dannie, git the wheelbarrer, an' go down to the depot, an' wait fer the baby. Peter, you run over to Mis' Hastin's an' ask her to let you have her cradle fer a day or two, will ye?"

"Oui, oui," said Peter, eagerly, and out he dashed into the darkness.

"An' git some bedclothes with it!" the Squire called after him.

"Now, le's see." The Squire looked around the room. Out of the eight men who were in the room with him, he had seven at work. The Squire thought a moment, then said: "Now, Silas, you jest skitter over to the store an' bring me over a mess o' jumpin' jacks, an' woolly dogs, an' monkey-on-sticks, an' sech things."

Silas sniffed scornfully, as he started toward the door. "All right, if you say so, an' want to pay fer 'em, but it strikes me you are a dretful fool."

"You won't git any argument out o' me on that pint," said the Squire.

As Silas reached the door, he stopped, thought a moment, and then came back. "William," he said, "I don't seem to remember much about this Bill Biffins. What did he do?"

The Squire was putting wood into the stove and fixing the drafts. "He never done nuthin'—decent. Say," and he straightened up, "do ye know anything about babies?"

Silas deliberated, then said: "They holler, an' ye feed 'em with milk."

"Yes," said the Squire, "that's about the extent o' my information, too."

He looked about the room, helplessly, as he went

on: "I'll have milk enough pooty soon, but I'm dretful shy on paraphrenalia."

All at once he started, went to the old bookcase, which he used as a sort of pantry and china closet combined, and wildy pawed through the conglomerate mess of dishes, books, papers, and bundles, with which it was "cluttered" up.

"Dern it," he muttered, "where is that nussin' bottle I was feedin' that sick puppy out uv last week? Oh, there ye be!" He hauled out a very disreputable looking nursing bottle, and, after hastily washing and wiping it, filled it with milk from the small can Dannie had bought for supper, placed it on the back of the stove to warm.

"But say," resumed Silas, when this was done, "what did Bill Biffins ever do fer you?"

"Never done nuthin'," said the Squire testily. "Bill was a kind o' wild critter. He an' his mother lived over to the Center. She wuz one of the Williams gals—used to live down to the pond. You remember, don't ye, Sallie Williams?"

"Oh, yes," replied Silas.

"Well, this Bill wuz allers drinkin' an' fightin', an' stayin' out o' nights, till, finally one night he an' a hoss got tangled up with the same piece o' rope! An' he got caught at it, too! Well, his mother come to me to take the case an' try an' git 'im off. So I told her I would."

"How much did ye git fer the case?" asked Silas.

"None o' your business!" promptly answered the Squire. "I looked the case up pooty thoroughly, an' I couldn't see no other way o' gittin' him off, so I let him have a hundred dollars to go out West somewhere."

"What did ye do that fer?"

"Oh, I had a hoss o' my own, an' I got sick o' sittin' up nights watchin' it," returned the Squire. "But you run along an' git them jumpin'-jacks and things."

"Well, all right, William, but you are an awful fool."

As Silas passed out, the Squire sat down in the rocking chair by the table, clasped his hands, and sighed, trying to remember what he knew about babies.

What if the baby should be sick? His heart turned faint. At that moment, the door was kicked open, and in staggered Pete with Mrs. Hastings' old red cradle. He placed it near the stove, and turned to the Squire triumphantly.

"Dere's de cradal, Meestaire Tappan! An' Mees Hastin's sez she var glad you need one bym-bye."

"Is that so?" asked the Squire. "Well, you tell Mis' Hastings the same to her, an' many uv 'um."

"An' she say —" Pete was fumbling in his coat pocket. He pulled out an old, leather-covered book and handed it to the Squire. "She say here ver good book fer yo' to read."

The Squire took the book, turned it around and read the title on the back: "Hints to Young Mothers"!

"Good! that's exactly what I need," exclaimed he.

The door opened again and in puffed Abe Slocum. He had a gallon can of milk, which he handed the Squire.

"Say, William," said Abe, "why don't ye git some o' the wimmin folks to take care o' this baby? You'll kill it sure."

"Who'll kill it?" inquired the Squire. "I jest want you to understand that I wuz tendin' babies afore you wuz born."

But after a few minutes' thought, he added: "An' besides, who would I git, anyway?"

"Well," said Abe, "I wuz thinkin' ye might git Cathilda Littlehale ter cum over fer a spell."

"Cathilda Littlehale?" said the Squire in disgust. "She'd be a fine one to welcome a strange baby, wouldn't she? One look at her would scare the baby to death. Humph! There's a woman so dern homely that a tater bug would run from 'er! I s'pose you heard me read that letter, didn't ye?"

"Ye-us," said Abe.

"Did ye hear anything in that letter about wimmin folks? Did ye hear anything about Cathilda Littlehale?"

"Why, no, but —"

"It said *me*, didn't it? It said there wa'n't a soul on earth ter send her to but me, didn't it?"

"Oh, well," said Abe, "have your own way."

"That's what I intend to do as long as I kin pay fer it," said the Squire determinedly.

Again the door opened and Silas Dalby came in with his arms full of toys, baby rattles, woolly dogs, tin horses, whistles, a Mother Goose book, and, in fact, everything in the toy line that Silas had left over from the previous Christmas.

"There," said he, as he placed them on the table, "they come to sixty-seven cents."

"All right!" said the Squire, with a laugh, "Gosh, but it costs money to bring up a family, don't it? Now you fellers git out o' here, an' kinder let me git quieted down a little before this baby comes! I kind o' want to git the lay o' the land."

"I guess I'll go over to the depot and git a look at the critter," said Abe, going to the door. "It's prob'ly the last time I'll ever see it alive."

"Is *that* so?" asked the Squire indignantly.

"Wait a minute an' I'll go with ye, Abe," said Silas.

"Pete," said the Squire, "what's happened to your curiosity?"

"Oui. Ah tank Ah go look at ze leetle babee, too," said Pete.

The three went out leaving the Squire helplessly dejected in his preparations for the newcomer.

CHAPTER XII

AFTER the others had all gone, and the Squire was left alone, he stood in the middle of the room for a few minutes, thinking, with his hands deep in his trousers pockets. Then he gave a deep sigh, went over to the big rocking chair beside the table, sat down and rocked to and fro.

"This is awful!" he said. "Me, Squire William M. Tappan, sixty-four years old, single, of good reputation, an' app'inted gardeen fer a baby! An' a gal baby at that!"

In an absent-minded way he was feeling through his pockets for the letter from Bill Biffins. He pulled out the faded envelope Abe Slocum had found in the old desk.

"Hello!" said the Squire. "There's that letter Abe found." He looked at it and turned it over. "Prob'ly the Widder's will." He tore off the end of the envelope and drew out a long, folded paper. Carefully he unfolded it, glanced at it and nodded his head.

"Ye-us, that's what it is. 'Last Will and Testament of Rebecca Hadley.' Um-m-m-m — bein' uv

sound will and mind, I do hereby will and bequeath all my property, pussonal and real estate t — to —' ”

The Squire jumped. “ What's that? ‘ My property, both pussonal and real estate — to William Mason Tappan, fer his good advice and kind heart.’ ”

The Squire wilted in his chair. “ There! I knew I'd be a rich man some day. An' there must be pooty nigh four thousand dollars uv that property by this time.”

He rocked back and forth for a few seconds.

“ Now, who would uv thought o' her leavin' her property to me? 'Tain't right, nuther! That daughter o' hern ought to have it. I never done nuthin' fer the old lady, only to tell her she wuz scandalous to treat her daughter so.— Four — thousand — dollars! Lordy! But that's an awful lot o' money. Now, 'bout the fust thing I am goin' to buy is —! ”

The Squire stopped suddenly.

“ There! See, I'm gettin' jest the same as rich folks. I don't think uv nothin' but myself. An' there's that baby comin'! ”

He shoved the will into his pocket briskly and began to look about the room at his preparations.

“ Now, le's see if we are all ready fer her. There's the cradle fer her to sleep in. There's her

supper a-cookin' on the stove. Here's toys fer her to play with. And —"

Suddenly he stopped and a blank expression came over his face. "Gosh! I—I hope she's got clothes — and — baby fixin's — and —"

The Squire sat motionless. A hitherto unthought-of train of possibilities and probabilities opened up before his horrified imagination. After a moment's deep thought, he turned and looked toward the stove. Then he turned back and looked through a work basket which sat upon the table. From an assortment of yarn, nails, pins, needles, twine, tape, cigar ends, and tobacco ashes, he finally resurrected a piece of cord about six feet long. He went over to the stove and carefully strung it across from one end of the mantel to the other, so that it hung over the stove, ready for all emergencies.

He heaved a sigh of relief that he had thought of this in time, and, resuming his seat, took up the book Mrs. Hastings had sent over by Pete. He turned over a page or two carelessly and then started to read, following the words with his finger as he pronounced them.

"I don't know what I would have done without this 'Hints to Young Mothers,' " he said.

" 'In feedin' the baby you always —' " suddenly he stopped, looked closer, read a line further, and then hurriedly turned over the page.

He soon found a page more to his liking, for he settled back again, and began to read aloud.

“ ‘Bringin’ the baby up on the bottle. Allers see that the milk is properly boiled.’ ” He glanced proudly over at the nursing bottle on the stove. “Well, I’ve got one thing right, anyway. ‘Allers hold the baby so its head is higher than its feet.’ There! That’s valuable information,” he said, “I wuz thinkin’ o’ carryin’ her ’round by the heels. ‘In case of colic, lay the baby across the knee, and gently pat the back.’ What’s that?”

The Squire read the line again and then scratched his chin reflectively. “I never knew that spankin’ cured colic, before. But then,” he sighed, “we live and learn.”

He resumed his reading. “ ‘Allers sing the baby to sleep.’ Well — ” He turned to the table and picked up the Mother Goose book Silas had brought over with the toys. “Well, I guess there ain’t but one thing to sing to babies, and that is Old Mother Goose.”

He opened the book and prepared to rehearse, when another thought struck him. He propped the book up against the lamp, went over to the cradle and took a pillow from it. Going back to his chair, he arranged the pillow on his arm, as near as he could in the position he concluded a baby would occupy.

"Might jest as well do this thing right as wrong," he said. Then, turning to the book, he began to sing in a doleful voice:

"Oh-h-h-h—There was an old woman,
And she had three sons,
Jerry and James and John . . ."

There was a hesitating knock at the door, but the Squire was too busy to notice it,—

"Jerry was hung, and James was drowned . . ."

The knock was repeated, but the Squire was still unconscious of anything but the fate of the three sons.

"And John was lost and never was f-o-u-n-d . . ."

The Squire was winding up the selection with a sort of running, crescendo trill, when the door was softly opened, and a round, merry face, with dancing brown eyes, peeped in. The owner of the eyes stepped in and closed the door. The Squire had just taken a breath, ready to take the high note, when he heard a sweet, girlish voice say:

"I beg your pardon, sir!"

Motionless as a rock he sat. Like a flash it came to him, what an utterly, ridiculous figure he must cut, sitting there, rocking back and forth, with a pillow

in his arms, singing Mother Goose rhymes at the top of his voice. Without looking up, he softly and silently lifted himself from the chair by grasping the two arms and, with his heel, kicked the pillow under him. Then, in an unconcerned sort of way, he began to hum a tuneless tune, as he carelessly brushed away an imaginary speck of dirt from his sleeve. Carelessly he turned himself about, until he could see who was seeking admittance. The next moment he was on his feet, for what the Squire saw was an extremely attractive girl standing by the door.

"Well. I swan to man!" exclaimed the Squire. "How do you do? Come right in. Have a seat. Have a seat."

"Thank you," answered the sweet voice, as its owner took the chair the Squire had vacated.

"Don't mention it," replied the Squire mechanically.

The visitor placed a small satchel on the floor and turned to the Squire.

"You are Squire William Tappan, I believe?" she said, with a smile.

"Yes, ma'am. I am the Squire."

"And you are wondering who I am, aren't you?"

The Squire was now standing in front of the stove, facing the girl, with his hands clasped behind him. He smiled, in an embarrassed sort of way, as the

girl asked this question, for he felt that he ought to know her.

"Well, do ye know," he said, "I can't quite place ye. Your face looks real familiar, too."

"Why," said she, laughingly, "I am Pauline Biffins."

The Squire started. "You're what?"

"Pauline Biffins. William Biffins' daughter, from Leadville, Colorado," said the girl.

"Sufferin' Sciatica!" gasped the Squire, in an agonized whisper.

This young woman, bubbling over with health and beauty! This! This the baby he had been preparing for? His eyes wandered about the room. Suddenly he made a dive, grabbed the nursing bottle and put it into his trousers pocket. Another wild swing and the string he had tied up under the mantel was torn down and tossed under foot. The bottle being too warm for comfort, he tore it from his pocket and threw it into the cradle. He smiled, but the smile was forced. Almost instantly his face grew serious again.

He scrutinized her closely. No, it simply could not be. He swallowed something in his throat that seemed to choke him, and asked again:

"You are *what?*"

"I am Pauline Biffins. William Biffins' daughter, of Leadville, Colorado."

"About how old are you?" he suddenly asked.

"Twenty-one," replied the girl. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nuthin'," said the Squire with a sigh, "only you're older 'n I was expectin', that's all."

"Then you *did* expect me?" inquired the girl eagerly.

"Oh, yes," replied the Squire, rising to his feet, "I expected ye — some. I didn't expect ye quite so much, though."

"You got my telegram, didn't you, saying I was coming on the eight o'clock train?" asked the girl anxiously.

"Oh, yes, yes. Our — er — family coach is over to the depot to meet ye," said the Squire. A vision of this young lady being hauled up the street in a wheelbarrow arose in his mind's eye. "I bet ye didn't notice our family coach, did ye?"

"No," she answered. "All I saw was a boy with a wheelbarrow." And she threw back her head and laughed merrily, displaying even, white teeth. "He wanted to know if my name was Chaperonee."

"Yes," said the Squire gravely. "That wuz the coachman. But where is Mis' Chaperonee?"

"Where is who?" asked the girl.

"Mis' Chaperonee," the Squire repeated.

She looked thoughtful for a moment, and then, in

a half puzzled way, asked: "Is it my chaperon you mean?"

The Squire nodded. "I s'pose so."

"Oh, she did not stop here. She was going through to Montreal, and she agreed to look after me until we got here. I don't know what I should have done without her. You see, I've never traveled alone. Father was always with me before." The big, brown eyes grew moist, as she looked up, with a half smile on her lips.

"I'm afraid I am *not* very welcome."

"Yes ye be! Yes ye be!" exclaimed the Squire hastily. "Ye are jest as welcome as the flowers in May! But—er—" And the Squire again became embarrassed. "Ye see, I had a little trouble jest before ye come in, and it kind o' upset me a little."

The girl sprang to her feet. "Oh, I see! The baby!"

"Yes. Yes," he said nervously. "I don't s'pose you ever had the care of a baby on your hands, did ye?"

Pauline admitted that she never had. "But," she added, "I am going to help you care for this one." She pushed his arm away and hurried over to the cradle. The Squire stood motionless. There was a moment's silence. The girl stooped,

pulled away the pillow which the Squire had thrown into the cradle, and looked underneath it.

"Why," she exclaimed, "there is no baby here!"

"Ain't there?" the Squire asked weakly.

"Why, no. The baby is gone."

"Baby gone?" repeated the Squire.

"Yes," cried the girl. "Where is it?"

The Squire helplessly felt through his pockets.

"Now, have I mislaid that baby again?" he asked helplessly. He looked under the cradle, under the bed clothing; he even lifted them up and shook them, as if the baby might be concealed in a wrinkle somewhere. He then looked under the stove, and, just as he was about to look in the oven, she asked:

"Where is your baby?"

He straightened up and looked at her, as if he had just heard her aright.

"Oh-h-h-h! You are talkin' about the baby."

"Yes. Yes."

"Well, the — er — er — er," and the Squire looked at her as an idea came to him. "Oh! The baby grew up!"

"Grew up?"

"Ye-up," said the Squire complacently.

"Then why is the cradle here?" asked she, pointing to it.

The Squire looked at her, then followed the di-

rection of her finger. He looked at the cradle for a moment, then back at her, and a smile crept over his face as he answered:

"Well, ye see, the baby growed up so quick, we didn't have time to git the cradle out."

"Oh," exclaimed the girl disappointedly. "Then you haven't got any baby?"

"No," said the Squire emphatically.

"I am so sorry."

"Well. We wuz a leetle disappointed at fust, but I guess we'll git over it."

The girl turned from him, and was just about to sit down by the table again when she caught sight of the array of woolly dogs, jumping-jacks and other educational devices for infants, on the table.

"See here," said Pauline, picking up one of the toys, "if you have no baby, what are all these toys for?"

Gently but firmly the Squire took the toys from her.

"Say, you're wuss'n a cross examination! We hain't got no baby. We never *did* have a baby. And we don't expect we ever *will* have a baby."

As he spoke, the Squire was busily cramming the toys into a waste-paper basket. "This is a Christmas box we're gittin' up to send over to — er — er to an Old Ladies' Home."

The girl laughed. "I should think those things would be very useful at an Old Ladies' Home!"

"I guess they'll be jest as useful there as they're goin' to be here," said the Squire, coming over to her and looking down into her eyes for a moment. He smiled and said:

"Say, honest now, be ye Bill Biffins' baby?"

"Well," said she, laughing, "I am Bill Biffins' daughter, anyhow."

The Squire again looked into the big, brown eyes, then held out his hand.

"Well, Bill Biffins' daughter, I'm dern glad to see ye! I didn't quite know as I would be, but I be!"

The girl put her hand into his. He held it closely for a moment, looking straight into her eyes. She looked just as straight into his. For a few seconds they stood thus. And in those few seconds a friendship was formed that was never broken.

The next minute the Squire was all bustle again.

"Come now. Take off them duds and move right in. Ye know this is goin' to be your home."

She took off her hat and coat and handed them to him. He laid them on a chair and hurried over to the stove.

"I swan, jest think o' you comin' all the way from Leadville, Coloradie, jest ter find me. Lord! What a trip. But you jest set right down there

now and I'll git ye a bite o' somethin' ter eat, quicker 'n a cat kin wink."

The Squire was taking off his coat and tying an old apron around his waist. Pauline turned to him in surprise.

"Why, isn't your wife at home?"

The Squire turned his head and looked at her.

"My what?"

"Your wife. You have a wife, haven't you?"

"Well, only mentally," the Squire replied.

"How is that?" asked the girl.

"Well," said the Squire, as he tied the apron strings in front, then twisted them around behind, "the ones I wanted I couldn't git, and the ones I could git, the old Harry himself wouldn't hev had."

"Oh, then you must let me help you get supper," said she earnestly.

"Oh, jest set down there," said the Squire, "I ain't goin' to pizen ye."

She laughed again, and sat down by the table. The Squire took from the top of the bookcase a tiny teapot, looked into it, placed it back and took down a battered old tea caddy and measured out the proper amount of tea, all the while glancing at the girl. He stopped and shook his head.

"Well, I swan. I can't git over you bein' Bill Biffins' baby."

"No?" replied she. "And you can't imagine

how much father thought of you. Why, he thought there was nobody in the world like you."

The Squire sighed. "Well, I guess ther' ain't."

He filled the teapot with water from the kettle, placing it on the back of the stove to "draw."

Pauline watched him for a moment. She looked about the little room. From what her father had told her of how big a man the "Squire" was, and how he had helped him when all others failed, she had pictured the Squire as comparatively rich. But now, as she looked around the little room, her heart failed her.

"Mr. Tappan," said she, "are you sure that I am welcome?"

"Why, of course you're welcome!" exclaimed he, heartily. "You'd be welcome for your mother's sake, if fer nothin' else."

"My mother's sake! Why, you didn't know my mother, did you?"

"No, no," said the Squire. "I didn't *know* her, but I pitied her."

"Pitied her?" inquiringly.

"Yes. I pitied any woman that married Bill Biffins —"

"What!" cried the girl.

The Squire hastened to add: "And then had to die and leave him. I pitied her because she couldn't live and enjoy Bill's society. You see, I knew Bill."

"Oh, I see," said the girl, then musingly added, "and how often he spoke of you. Do you know," looking up at the Squire, as he was placing some dishes on the table beside her, "do you know, his devotion to you was something touching?"

"Oh, yes, yes," said the Squire gravely. "He showed *that* the night he left here."

Seeing a speck of dust on one of the spoons, the Squire wiped it carefully with his apron, as he continued:

"I s'pose Bill wuz quite a feller out there in Coloradie, wa'n't he?"

"Oh! My! Yes," answered the girl. "Always ready to take the lead in anything."

The Squire thought of the episode with the horse, the rope and Bill, as he assured her, "Oh, yes, he begun to git that way before he left here."

"Oh, he was a good man," said the girl, earnestly.

"Ye-up," said the Squire, "he was a good man—" adding under his breath, "in his line." He sliced some bread and then went over to the stove and took down a toaster from a nail. He then placed a chair before the stove, removed one of the stove covers and sat down to carefully toast the bread.

"Was father in politics here?" inquired the girl.

"Well, I should say Bill was in politics here,"

replied the Squire. "Bill usually cast the decidin' vote every election."

"How was that?"

"Well, ye see in this town we had forty-two Demicrats, forty-two Republicans — and Bill."

The Squire resumed his toasting.

The girl sat thoughtful for a moment, then a suspicion flashed across her mind.

"You don't mean to insinuate that father would sell his vote, do you?" she cried, indignantly.

"No! No! No!" the Squire hastily assured her. Then he added to himself, "A good, responsible party could usually convince him with a good, tangible argument. Ouch!"

The Squire, in attempting to turn the damper, had burned his fingers. He was just about to express an opinion on the subject, when he remembered his guest, so he turned to her, and said:

"Would ye go out fer jest a minute? I think I'm goin' to use language."

Pauline jumped up and ran to him laughing.

"Oh, Mr. Tappan, let me help you."

The Squire looked up at her.

"Say, don't you think I kin burn my fingers without help? You jest sit right down there and read that paper. You'll find it's a dretful, good paper."

"I read that paper through three times, on the train," she replied, as she took her seat.

"That shows ye how good it is," answered the Squire.

"I'll tell you what you *can* do, though," said the girl.

"Good. I've been fifty years tryin' ter find that out. What is it?"

"Tell me about this part of the country. If this is going to be my home, I want to know all about it."

"What do ye want to know 'bout it?"

"Oh, the politics, and the ways. What *are* the politics of this state?"

The Squire looked at her a moment, then said seriously:

"Rotten!"

"Well, tell me about them. I suppose you know all about politics, don't you?"

"Well, I ought to know all 'bout 'em. Didn't ye know I wuz elected Sheriff o' this county ag'in, last election?"

Her eyes grew big. "Honestly?"

"What difference does that make?" asked the Squire, quickly.

The girl laughed heartily and then asked, "I suppose you have contests between Republicans and Democrats here, the same as we have out West?"

"Yes," replied the Squire, "where ye find one ye ginerally find the other. Ye kinder have to have one to offset the other."

Taking the teapot in one hand and the toaster in the other, he came over to the table and arranged the table for her.

"I bet ye it's a wild country out there in Colorado, ain't it?"

"Wild?" She met the twinkle in his eye with one equally mischievous.

"Ye-us. I'll bet ye — there's lions and tigers and elephants runnin' 'round loose, out there."

Pauline looked at him curiously, to see if he was really in earnest, then answered seriously:

"Oh, yes! Especially elephants. Streets full of them."

"Gosh!" said the Squire, "I shouldn't think ye'd dare stick yer nose out doors a minute."

"Just pets, that's all."

"Elephants? Pets?"

"Why, yes. The children play with them. And then, they are so good to keep moths out of carpets."

The Squire's jaw was dropping more and more. He looked at her for a moment. Her eyes were dancing, but her face was serious.

"Say," finally asked the Squire, "what in thunder are ye talkin' 'bout?"

"Why, out in Leadville," said she, "when moths get into your carpets, you just bring your pet elephant into the house and he walks around. His

feet crack the eggs, the air gets in and the moth dies before it is born."

She sat back triumphantly. The Squire looked at her, speechless for a moment. Then he went over to the stove, hung up the toasting fork and closed the damper of the stove, saying:

"I guess Bill Biffins wuz your father, all right."

During this, the girl had taken a sip of the tea. A sip, that was all. She hurriedly looked at the Squire. His face was turned away. She smelled the concoction. Then she turned to him again.

"Mr. Tappan!" He turned to her. "Could I ask you one question?"

"I guess ye could. I asked *you* one."

"Well — er — do you always make tea in this kind of a pot?"

The Squire grabbed up the teapot, opened it and looked into it, smelled it and smelled it again.

"By Gosh!" he said, "I bet I dropped a cigar into that teapot." Then, turning to her, he said, "Oh, say. I'm awful sorry. You jest wait a minute and I'll make ye anuther."

"No, no, Mr. Tappan. Truly, I'm not a bit hungry."

"Well. I *can* make good tea," expostulated the Squire.

"Yes. I know you can, but I don't want any; I am really too tired to eat a thing."

The Squire was about to press her further, when suddenly he stopped, and stood listening. He heard the men coming back and thought for the first time of what they would say. What a story it would be for them! He knew he would never hear the last of it.

Bill Biffins' baby. All his elaborate preparations for an infant. The cradle, the toys, the nursing bottle; the "Hints to Young Mothers." All this flashed through his mind in an instant. He looked at the girl. She was looking into a locket which she wore on a chain about her neck. Softly he stepped to the window and gently drew the curtains. The voices came nearer. He could hear Abe Slocum, Hi Sawtell, Zeke Hadley, Bill Spivins and Peter. They were discussing the strange non-arrival of the baby. He heard the gate open. He could hear their footsteps coming around the path. He tiptoed to the door, opened it, and softly stepped outside. Around the corner came the "Committee of Welcome." The Squire held up his finger with a warning gesture.

"H-s-s-s-h. H-s-s-s-h."

"What is it?" asked Abe Slocum.

"Hush. Keep still," said the Squire in an agonizing whisper. "Boys, for the love of Heaven, go away, will ye?"

"No babee on de train," whispered Pete.

"Where do ye suppose that baby is, William?" asked Zeke.

"H-s-s-h. Go away. I'll tell ye all about it in the mornin'."

"Did ye hear anything, Squire?" asked Hi Sawtell.

"Yes. I heard somethin' an' I don't ever expect to stop hearin' it nuther. But go away and I'll tell ye all 'bout it in the mornin'."

On tiptoe, with bated breath, the committee went around the corner, and home.

The Squire opened the door, and entered as noiselessly as he had gone out. He stood there for a moment.

"So ye think ye won't have anythin' to eat, eh?"

"No, Mr. Tappan. No, thank you," said the girl. After a moment's thought, she looked up and asked, "Mr. Tappan, what are you going to put me to doing here?"

"Put ye to doin'?"

"Yes. What work?"

"Why, what do ye want to work fer?"

"Why, to live. I have no money. Folks can't live here without money, can they?"

"No, no. We *have* had cases where they couldn't live *with* money. But I guess I kin keep ye agoin' awhile, though."

He went to the stove and stood, back to it, with his hands clasped behind him, looking at her with a smile.

"But, my dear sir, I am not going to live on your money," she said. "If I can't find anything to do here — I shall go where I can."

The Squire looked at her gravely

"U-m. Plannin' to move out before ye git moved in, eh? Humph! You must like this place a lot."

The hardness left the girl's face at once.

"Oh, Mr. Tappan, it isn't that. But I can't be dependent on charity. Why, you are not a rich man, are you?"

He partly pulled out the will of Mrs. Hadley's from his pocket, and displayed it.

"I've got money comin'." Then he added, to himself, "If my conscience would only shet up."

"Yes," she said, "but that does not help me any."

"Then it's your own fault, fer ye're welcome to it."

He looked at her closely for a minute, then suddenly asked, "What kin ye do, anyway?"

"I can teach school, for one thing," said she.

The Squire jumped. "Ye kin do what?"

"Teach school. I taught two years out in Leadville."

"Well, I swan!" said the Squire. "Talk 'bout Providence, Bill Biffins' Baby. You're engaged *now* to teach our school. Our teacher quit yisterday an' I wuz wonderin' where I could git anuther."

The girl clapped her hands.

"Oh, isn't that lovely!" she cried.

"Well, I don't know whether it is or not," said the Squire doubtfully. "Some of our teachers git awful homesick with the kind o' scholars we have here."

"Well, I shall not. Just try me," said the girl firmly.

"By George. I believe you'll do," said the Squire admiringly. "I've got to bring an armful of wood. I won't be a minute. You might read that paper over again."

When he was gone, the girl took up her locket and sat looking at it until he came back. He tossed the wood into the wood-box, put a few sticks into the stove and turned to the girl. She sat looking at him with an earnest look. He asked:

"What's the matter, Bill Biffins' Baby?"

The girl thought for a moment, then said: "Mr. Tappan, did you ever know any one around here by the name of Gould?"

The Squire looked at her curiously.

"What makes ye ask that?"

"Because —" she hesitated, then determinedly

went on, "because I had a — a — friend out in Leadville by that name, and he, this friend, came from somewhere in New Hampshire."

"What wuz her fust name?" asked the Squire.

Pauline smiled. "Well, this wasn't that kind of a friend."

"Oh, ho!" answered the Squire. "Well, then, what wuz *his* fust name?"

"Will. Will Gould," answered the girl quietly.

The Squire looked at her closely. A slight frown came into his forehead.

"What are ye doin'? Jokin' me?" he asked.

The girl looked at him quickly.

"Why, no. I'll show you his picture, if you like," and she detached the locket and handed it to him. The Squire took it and examined it, nodding his head, saying:

"So that is your friend, is it?"

"Yes," replied the girl without looking up.

"U-m! An' do ye carry all yer friends' pictures 'round in gold locketts?"

Pauline laughed, in an embarrassed sort of way.

"Why, no!"

The Squire eyed her closely for a moment, then looked into the locket again and back at her.

"Did ye kinder like this feller, pooty well?"

"Yes. I liked him very much. But —" she added regretfully, "father 'did not like him."

"Well," and the Squire straightened up, "that's one thing in his favor, anyway."

After a pause, he continued, "But did ye say this feller was out in Leadville?"

"Yes."

"What wuz he doin' out there?"

"Working a mine."

"Doin' what?"

"Working a mine."

The Squire sighed. "Then it ain't the feller I thought it wuz."

"How do you know?"

"Well," replied the Squire, "in the fust place, this feller I wuz thinkin' of couldn't 'er got out there. In the second place, this feller ain't got no mine. In the last place, even if this feller did have a mine, he wouldn't be workin' on it."

He sat thinking for a moment, then asked:

"Did ye ever hear how this feller come to have a mine?"

"No," said she, with a smile. "You know out there in the West, people neither ask nor answer questions like that."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know. But, out there, they take a man for what he is, not what he has been. They don't ask questions about the past. Why, I don't recall any allusion to his life in the East. I don't

remember of ever hearing even my father say much about *his* past."

"No, I don't doubt it," said the Squire. "But tell me about this Gould feller."

"Why, there isn't much to tell," said the girl gently. "Only, I met him one night, down at the Post Office. You know what a mining camp is — a rather rough place sometimes — and there were two or three fellows there who were rather boisterous. They were strangers or they would never have said or done anything to cross father. But they didn't know who I was, and one of them said he would kiss me. But just as he had his arms outstretched, that way, to catch me, there was a revolver shot, and he jumped back, with a bullet hole right through his hand. I looked around and saw this Will Gould with a smoking revolver."

"What's that?" interrupted the Squire. "Wuz it him that put the bullet through the other feller's hand?"

"Yes."

The Squire looked troubled. "He must hev shot at his foot."

The girl went on. "The others wanted to make trouble, but Will had his revolver and his partner stood beside him with another, so the men concluded to leave town. After that, I used to see him quite often and I soon began to like him, right well.

And — Oh, I hate to tell you this. It sounds so silly."

The old man looked at her without saying a word, then exclaimed:

"Bill Biffins' Baby. The silliest things in this world are the sweetest. Now come on an' tell me more about this young feller."

"Well, one night, as we were walking home, from the Post Office, he — he asked me to be his sweetheart. I know I shouldn't have done it, but I was so lonesome I — I — I just couldn't help it. And I said: 'Yes.'"

The Squire stood looking at her for a moment, and his eyes were getting dim, when all at once he turned and went toward the stove.

"I'm goin' to make ye anuther cup o' tea."

The girl jumped up laughing, and brought him back.

"No, no, honestly, I couldn't eat a thing," she said.

"All right! All right," said he, patting her hand. "And so you said you would be this Will's sweetheart, eh?"

"Yes. And for a month I was so happy that it seemed as if I must wake up and find out it was only a dream. And then — then — well, I did wake up, for father found it out."

"There, I knew he would make a mess out of

it, some way," said the Squire. "What did he do?"

"Oh, he talked shamefully to Will. He said it would be disgracing our name for me to marry him."

"Well, the derved fool," said the Squire.

The girl went on.

"And then Will called father a few things."

"Good! Good fer him!" exclaimed the Squire.

"And then Will had to go up into the mountains. And while he was gone—" the girl's voice began to tremble, "father died."

The Squire patted the little hand lying in his, but said nothing. Presently she went on:

"Before father died, he made me promise to come on here, to you, at once. I didn't know where Will was, so I could only leave a letter there at Leadville for him, and come away."

She had gone as far as she could. She went to the table, dropped into a chair, and burying her face in her arms on the table, sobbed. The Squire looked at her in dismay. He looked at the heaving shoulders and wanted to take her in his arms and comfort her, but doubted his ability. He looked around the room helplessly. Then his face lit up. He hurriedly went over to the bookcase, took down the old tea caddy, and looked around for something to make a cup of tea. There was nothing. In des-

peration, he rushed over and poured water liberally into the caddy itself and placed it on the stove. The girl dashed the tears from her eyes and said:

"Oh, Mr. Tappan, I'm nervous. I'm all tired out. I will tell you everything in the morning."

"Why, that's all right, little gal. You go to bed jest the minute you git sleepy."

"Where do I sleep?" she inquired, as she opened her traveling bag.

The Squire gasped. Here was another complication. He had entirely overlooked the fact that, with a young woman guest on his hands, the little back room of the office offered shelter for one, leaving the cradle for himself and Dannie. He looked at her in despair. She was busy with her satchel. He looked at the cradle. He had just taken a step toward the door to the back room, to see if all was well there, when he heard a sound that stopped the beating of his heart. It was Dannie coming back from the depot. Here was another complication. Silently he tiptoed into the next room and softly took Dannie's nightie from its hook, silently tiptoed back into the room, then across to the back door, and, just as Dannie opened it and began to explain that no baby had arrived, he hushed him up, pulled his head down and whispered in his ear. Pushing him out into the night, he closed the door with a sigh of relief.

Up the road, with his nightie clasped in his arms, went Dannie, to Miss Silver's, for the night.

The girl, busy with her satchel, had noticed nothing.

"There," said the Squire, "your boudoir is ready — right in there."

"All right," she replied, brightly, "but before I go, here is a paper that father wanted me to be sure and give to you, just as soon as I got here. He said you would know why."

"All right. All right, little gal. I'll look it over bimeby."

He took the paper and sat down in the old rocker by the table. The girl picked up a candle. For a moment, she stood irresolute, then she said:

"Mr. Tappan, I don't know just how I am going to thank you for all your kindness to me — but wait till I get to teaching school and I'll show you."

"All right," said he, "you jest lick that Silver boy, 'bout twice a day, an' I'll call it square."

Again she started to go, but hesitated, then bent over the Squire and softly kissed his forehead. The Squire sat petrified. It was the first time in thirty years that he had known a woman's kiss. The girl went over to the door, leading to the other room. She stopped and turned back.

"Good-night, Mr. Tappan," she said.

"Good-night, Bill Biffins' Baby," said the Squire, huskily.

"Good-night!" and she was gone.

The Squire sat and watched her until she had closed the door, then sat wrapped in deep thought for a while. His eyes happened to rest on the book, "Hints to Young Mothers." He picked it up and sat looking at it for a few moments. He began to laugh, silently.

"By Gosh! I hope she don't have the colic!" he said.

He noticed the paper Bill Biffins had been so anxious about, picked it up, tore it open and glanced at it.

"Well, I swan! If it ain't Bill's weddin' certificate!"

He glanced through it. All at once he started.

"What's that? Well, I'll be derved!"

He re-read the lines that had surprised him.

"Yes, sir. So *that* is who Rebecca Hadley's daughter run away with and married. Run clean to Coloradie to marry a horse thief. Yessir. 'William Biffins and Pauline A. Hadley, of Bradford, New Hampshire, U. S. A.' Well, no wonder the old lady was mad. Why—"

He thought a minute and then turned, looking at the door to the other room, as he said in a whisper:

"Then Rebecca Hadley wuz that girl's grandmother."

The extended arm sank to his side, his face grew sober, as he drew from his pocket the will that Abe Slocum had brought to him that night. The will that made him rich; the will that meant new clothes, new furniture, new books, and, after forty years of waiting, his longed-for clarinet. For a moment he stood there, looking at the paper, then slowly, and in a half whisper, said:

"An' ef it wasn't fer that will, leavin' all that money to me, it would all belong to Bill Biffins' Baby."

Silently he stood for a moment, then exclaimed:

"No, no! That wouldn't be right. That would be triffin' with the law."

He looked about the room, to see if all was right for the night. The bright, crimson glow from the old stove, and the moonlight streaming in through the window cast soft shadows. Silently, he crossed the room, and sat down by the casement. The moonbeams, streaming in, fell on the tall figure and frosted the silvery hair. The flickering light, from the candle, threw deeper shadows on his kindly face. For a few moments he sat motionless, as if carved in stone. Bill Biffins' Baby. Bill Biffins' daughter — and *her* granddaughter — the granddaughter of

the one woman who, if things had been different — but no, that couldn't be. That was a page in his life that had been turned down long years ago. Bill Biffins' Baby! What a brave little woman she was. Even now, on her first night, she wanted to know what she was going to "do." She had absolutely refused to be a burden to any one and if she could not find "something to do here," she was going away. And then the words of Bill's letter came back to him.

"She ain't got no mother, she ain't got no money, she ain't got nothin'. An' there ain't a soul on earth but you to send her to."

The old man looked fixedly at the discolored will, which meant so much to him; the vision of wealth and luxury began to fade.

"She ain't got no mother, she ain't got no money —"

The old man turned and looked toward the room where Bill's Baby slept. He looked again at the will. His face grew softer. A smile, like sunshine, spread over his dear, worn face, and he murmured:

"And she is Will's little sweetheart."

Then, with a look of determination, he quickly held the paper in the flame of the candle. For an instant the room was aglow, and the next moment,

the only thing that stood between Pauline Biffins and her grandmother's property lay on the stove hearth, a heap of ashes.

"Good-night, Bill Biffins' Baby!" whispered the Squire. He blew out the candle. "Good-night," he whispered again, as he wrapped a buffalo robe about his knees and leaned back in the big chair for the night.

CHAPTER XIII

THE Squire, awakened by the sound of wheels, threw aside the old buffalo robe, tiptoed to the door, and listened. He heard Tom, talking to the horse. He heard Betsy sputtering, as she fumbled at the gate.

"Oh, Lord!" said the Squire, "now my troubles do begin."

He went to the corner of the house and held up a warning finger. "Hish! Hish!" he said.

"What's the matter?" demanded Betsy. "Is the baby asleep?"

"Yes," answered the Squire, "the baby's asleep."

Betsy grumbled and expostulated while the Squire poked the fire and put on a couple of sticks of wood. The numerous coverings which had enveloped her for the long ride in the night, were removed.

"Well," she said, glancing at the empty cradle, "where is it?"

"Oh, it's in there," said he, pointing to the door of the other room.

"In there?" demanded Betsy. "What you got

it in there fer? Why didn't you put it in the cradle?"

"Oh, well," said the Squire, sparring for time, "it didn't exactly fit the cradle."

"Didn't fit it?" asked Betsy glancing at him. "What's the matter with it? How big is it?"

"I don't know jest what size you would call it," said he, "but it is too big for the cradle, anyway."

"So ye put it in your bed, did ye?" asked Betsy. The Squire nodded.

"An' you wuz settin' up all night, wa'n't ye?" She looked at the buffalo robe.

The Squire nodded again.

Betsy looked at him pityingly, for a moment, and then said:

"William, you're an awful fool."

He did not deny it.

Betsy went on.

"You put a fool baby in your bed and wuz tryin' to sleep with that moth-eaten old robe fer bed-clothes. Why didn't ye wrap the baby up in a blanket an' put it on two chairs? Humph!" Betsy grunted disgustedly.

"Well," she said, reaching to the mantel and taking down a candle, "I s'pose I might as well go in and look at it." She started toward the door.

"Why don't ye tell me? Why don't ye talk?"

The Squire hastened to stand in front of her.

"No, not now, Betsy. I — I — know you are goin' to scold. But — I — well, I can't help it. It ain't my fault. I didn't do it."

Betsy stood looking at him. "Ye didn't do what? Ye hain't killed it, have ye?"

"No, no," hastily replied he, "'tain't as bad as that, I guess, but —"

"Well, then, what is the matter with it?" asked Betsy.

"The fact is," said the Squire, stopping to sigh, and then continuing determinedly, "the fact is, it ain't no baby at all."

"It ain't a baby?" exclaimed Betsy.

"No," said the Squire, "'tain't."

"Then what is it?"

"It's a young woman."

Betsy did not speak. She simply stood there and looked at the Squire. It looked bad for him. Tom had come driving furiously to the lake, saying the Squire had "a baby" coming on the eight o'clock train, and wanted her to come right home at once. She had hurriedly gathered up a few things in her hand bag, and rode back through the darkness. And now her brother stood there and deliberately told her that there was no baby there. The baby was a young woman. This young woman was occupying his room. There was but one deduction. The Squire had married at last.

"Well, gol ram it!" he exclaimed, when he could bear her gaze no longer, "I can't help it. I didn't ask her to come."

"Oh, I s'pose she jest come right along, without any encouragement at all from you," said Betsy scornfully.

"Encouragement?" exclaimed the Squire. "Thunder! I never even heard of her till to-night."

"Yes," said Betsy, looking up at him scornfully, "I s'pose she jest walked right in that door without any invitation at all."

"That's jest what she *did* do," said the Squire miserably.

"An' you never even heard of her before?" said she.

"No, sir, I didn't," answered the Squire.

"Then how did she know where to come to?" demanded Betsy.

"Why, her father sent her."

Betsy thought for a moment, then looked at him suspiciously. "Then what did ye want ter tell Tom it wuz a baby fer?"

"'Cause I thought it *wuz* a baby. The letter said 'My baby gal, Pauline.' How wuz I to know that his baby gal wuz twenty years old?"

"When did ye git this letter?"

"It come day before yist'day, but that little lunk-

head Dannie had it in his pocket till 'bout half an hour before train time," said the Squire.

Betsy thought for a moment, then gave a gasp, and glanced up at the door of the other room.

"Where is Dannie?" she asked.

The Squire smiled. "Oh, he's all right. I sent him over to Silvers' to sleep with Tommie."

Betsy thought a moment, then went over and sat down in the old rocking chair, beckoning the Squire to come and sit beside her.

"Come here. Come here and set down now an' tell me all about this mess you've got into. I can't make head nor tail to it. Why didn't ye take her to the house?"

"You had the keys," answered the Squire, impatiently.

In a half whisper, and with many a fearful look toward the door to the other room, the Squire told Betsy how, years ago, he had sent Bill Biffins away. He told her how Bill had gone West and married, and how, not knowing anybody else to trust her to, he had directed the little Pauline to come to him.

Betsy listened to it all with a look of mingled disgust and unbelief. She had seen and heard so many like tales in the last forty years, that her heart was getting hardened. Nannie and Dannie were at this minute living examples of the Squire's

gullibility. For forty years a stream of unfortunate humanity had been coming to their door to be clothed, fed and cared for.

When the Squire had finished his story, he watched her anxiously, as she sat there thinking. Finally she looked up at him.

"Well," she said, "what are you goin' to do about it?"

"Well, I dunno. I s'pose we'll have to kind o' look out for her a little, won't we?" he asked.

"Oh, ye do? Ye s'pose we'll have to kind o' look out fer her, do ye? Well, could ye inform me jest why we have got to look out fer Bill Biffins' gal?"

"Why," replied the Squire in a surprised tone, as if the reason was plain enough to be seen, "'cause there ain't nobody else to do it, is there?"

"Oh, yes," said Betsy disgustedly, "an' do ye expect to take care uv every penniless, poverty-stricken pusson in the world, that there ain't nobody else to look after?"

"She ain't penniless," said the Squire indignantly. "She's rich."

"Oh, she's rich, is she?" said Betsy doubtfully. "Where'd she git it? I s'pose Bill left it to her, didn't he?"

"If you wouldn't be in sech a turrible rush, an'

give me time to tell ye, I'd tell ye," said he. "You remember I told ye Bill got married, don't ye?"

Betsy sniffed superciliously. "Well, jedgin' from the fact that he left a daughter, I presumed that — at some period of his brief but eventful career — he had a wife."

"Yes," said the Squire, "you presumed he had a wife, but ye didn't presume who his wife wuz, did ye?"

Betsy admitted that she had not.

"Well," the Squire went on, "his wife wuz Pauline Hadley."

"Pauline Hadley!" cried Betsy, in surprise.

"Yes, sir," said he. "Pauline Hadley. It wuz Bill she run away with an' married."

"Well, I vum!" said Betsy. Then after a pause she continued, "Well, I don't blame Rebecca Hadley fer bein' mad about it. 'Twas bad enough fer her to run away, anyhow, but to marry that scamp —" and Betsy stopped for want of words.

"*NOW* this Pauline wuz Rebecca's only child, wa'n't she?" asked the Squire.

"Ye-us, I b'lieve she wuz," said she.

"Yes," continued the Squire, "an' this little Pauline wuz *her* only child, wa'n't she?"

Betsy nodded.

"Well, then, this little Pauline is the only heir, ain't she, to Rebecca Hadley's estate? An' that

estate is wuth three or four thousand dollars, if it's a cent. So ye see, she ain't so penniless an' poverty-stricken as ye thought she wuz."

"Well, then," said Betsy triumphantly, "if she's wuth all that money, what have you got to look out fer her for?"

"Well, Lordy, I ain't goin' to support her, be I? But why can't she board with you, an' pay her board, jest the same as she would anybody else?"

"I don't want to keep boarders," said Betsy testily.

The Squire sat looking at her for a few moments, then he began to smile. "But you'll want to keep *this* one."

"No, I won't, nuther," said she determinedly.

"Yes, you will, tuther," said the Squire, still smiling.

"What's the reason I will?" demanded Betsy suspiciously.

"Well," replied the Squire, sitting back and crossing his legs comfortably, for he saw the way clearly now, "there's two reasons. In the fust place, Betsy," and the old man's face grew soft, "I want ye to remember *who* her grandmother wuz."

There were a few moments of silence and then the Squire said softly, "I wouldn't want *her* granddaughter to suffer, Betsy." The Squire went to the window and looked out.

Betsy said nothing, but her lips came together in a firm line. She wouldn't say anything to hurt the Squire, but she had her opinion of her, of her daughter, and of her granddaughter.

The Squire glanced at her face and saw that she was still pretending to be unconvinced. It did not worry him in the least. He knew he had her so completely in his power, that he hated to hurry it. He wanted to play with her as a cat plays with a mouse. Slowly he arose and went behind Betsy to the table. He picked up something the girl had left there and came back to his seat. Whatever it was he had picked up, he concealed in his hand.

"An' there's another thing, Betsy. This little gal has got a sweetheart."

Betsy grunted. "Don't doubt it a mite. Got a dozen of 'em, prob'ly."

"No, she ain't, nuther," said the Squire indignantly. "She's got jest *one*. An' he'll be comin' to marry her one of these days. An' don't ye think it would be better fer her to have a kind uv a home while she's a-waitin' fer 'im?"

"Let her git a home, then," said Betsy. "Lordy, there's homes enough, ain't there, besides my house? She don't have to crowd herself in on us, does she?"

"Hush!" said the Squire warningly. "Don't ye worry about her crowdin' herself in on ye. She ain't that kind. Lord! I had to git her a job o'

teachin' school to keep her here in town at all. Now, I'll tell ye what le's do. Dannie and I will sleep out here in the office an' we'll fix up my room in the house fer her. An' she kin pay you her board. Then Dannie and I'll be better off, 'cause we kin stay up late nights, and raise thunder gin-erally, without botherin' anybody. The little gal will be better off 'cause she'll have a home. You'll be better off, 'cause you'll have the board money. Now what do ye say?"

Betsy looked up at him and there were tears in her eyes. She loved this brother of hers dearly. She knew and appreciated the fact that, all the years of his life, he had given up to her and hers. She would do anything and everything she could to please him, but this.

"William — I jest can't turn my house into a hotel. You don't understand. It wouldn't be my home any more. She'll want a clean towel every day. An' we'll have to have pie every day; an' cake, an' one thing a-nuther. 'Tain't like she wuz one of our own folks, ye know."

"Well," said the Squire, with a resigned sigh, although his eyes were twinkling, "if it's as bad as all that, I s'pose we'll have to let her go, but I wuz kind o' hopin', on account o' this feller o' hern, that we could fix her, here."

The Squire had now risen and was standing beside Betsy, looking at the object in his hand.

"He seems to be a real nice lookin' young feller. Here is his picture. She wears it round her neck, in this locket, ye see. She left it on the table here when she went to bed."

He held it out toward Betsy. She just glanced at it and paid no further attention.

"Go on, look at it," said the Squire. "See if it looks like anybody you ever saw."

Something in his voice made Betsy look quickly up at him. She took the locket, held it nearer to the lamp and examined it. She looked at it for a moment, then her hand began to tremble and she exclaimed:

"Why — why — why — it — it —"

She looked up at him piteously.

"William, it ain't —"

"It ain't what?" asked the Squire innocently.

"William Tappan," and her voice was stern, "William Tappan, who is that?"

"Well, of course, I couldn't say of my own knowledge," he replied, with tantalizing deliberation, "but the gal said he was a young feller out there in Leadville, Coloradie. Now, let me see. What did she say that feller's name wuz? Oh, yes, I remember now — 'Gould.' His name wuz Gould.

Will Gould. She wuz askin' me ef I knew him. She says he came from up here in New Hampshire somewheres; she didn't know jest where. But then, of course, as she is goin' to leave here in the mornin', you ain't interested in who her sweetheart is, or where she lives while she's waitin' fer him."

The Squire held out his hand for the locket.

"Now don't be a fool, jest because ye know how, William Tappan." Betsy clasped the locket tightly in her hand.

The Squire shrugged his shoulders and sat down again. Betsy wiped her eyes, as if to see clearer and looked at the picture in the locket again. Then, without looking up, she asked in a low voice:

"Where wuz it you said he wuz, William?"

"Leadville, Coloradie, I b'lieve the girl said," he answered unconcernedly.

"What's he doin' out there?"

"She says he's workin' a mine out there."

"How did he git out there?"

"I couldn't tell ye."

"Where'd he git the mine?"

"Couldn't tell ye that, nuther."

"An' this girl in there is his sweetheart?"

"So she sez."

"An' she's goin' to teach our school?"

"Ye-up."

There was a long pause. The Squire sat with

his legs crossed, swinging his foot. He had won, as he had known he would. *Her* granddaughter, and Will's sweetheart, would find a home after all.

Suddenly Betsy started and glanced out of the window.

"Lordy, if it ain't comin' daylight. We've sat up all night. Well," and she arose, gathering up her wraps, "come on."

"Come on where?" asked the Squire.

"Come on over to the house and clean your stuff out o' that room, ef she is goin' to move into it. You don't want her to find all your shirts, an' pants, an' seegar stumps, an' things in there, do ye?"

"Why," said the Squire, in pretended surprise, "I thought you didn't want ter go into the hotel bizness."

"Now don't be sech a fool," said she sharply. "You insisted on her comin' an' it's your house. Come along, now," and she started for the door. The Squire got up from his chair and came after her.

"Betsy!" he exclaimed.

She turned back as she stood at the door. He went up to her, and, placing his hands upon her shoulders, looked down into her eyes.

"Betsy, you're a dretful good sister to me."

Betsy shook his hands off brusquely, but there were tears in her eyes as she snapped:

"Now, William, you stop pesterin' me an' come

along an' help me clean that room out before that girl wakes up."

"All right, Betsy," answered the Squire, laughing, "but — er — er, say!"

Betsy stopped again and the Squire leaned over her and said:

"I guess we'd better not let her know that that room has been mine or she wouldn't take it. Let her think it has been the spare chamber. Jest let her think I've been sleepin' over to the office all the time."

And, together, they went across the yard, in the dim light, to the old house.

The shadows of the night drew further and further back, as the cold, gray dawn crept in under the old elms. For the next hour the sound of scrubbing and sweeping came from the old house, while the Squire noiselessly carried armful after armful of "pussonal belongings" from the big front chamber, that he had occupied so many years, over to the little office.

Silently working, in the gray dawn, the two old folks prepared a new home for Will's sweetheart, a place of refuge for "Bill Biffins' Baby."

CHAPTER XIV

AND so "Bill Biffins' Baby," as the Squire always called her, became another member of the household. For a wonder, this one was not a charity boarder. The Squire placed her in possession of a part of Mrs. Hadley's estate, at Pauline's request, acting as guardian for the real estate and such other property as might be increased by his management.

The school was to begin in a few days and Pauline, as a lady of fortune and as teacher of the school, was an important figure in the small town.

Betsy rebelled a little at first when Pauline would speak of "her Will," but it gradually adjusted itself.

When Betsy would say: "Why don't he write?" Pauline would say: "He told me he never would write home until he had something of which to be proud."

The Squire overhearing this one day, said: "Well, he got you, didn't he? Strikes me I would have considered that somethin' to be proud of."

Pauline laughed. "Oh, well, you see that shows the difference in opinions."

The school opened in due time, with Miss Biffins

"from out West," as the teacher. For a day or two the usual difficulties beset her, but there was an unbending firmness behind her smile that impressed the dullest scholar with the fact that this teacher had reserve force. This added to the emphatic declaration of the Squire that he was able, willing and anxious to lick anybody, boy, girl, man, woman or baby, that troubled the young teacher, soon established the most orderly school the village had ever known.

One morning they were cleaning up the Squire's office, or more exactly speaking, Nannie was cleaning, and Dannie was on the floor looking at pictures in the family Bible which he had found among the Squire's books. He had been looking intently at one picture for some time when he called to Nannie:

"Nannie! Nannie! Come here."

"Now, Dannie, you stop lookin' at them picture's, an' come an' help me get cleaned up here before Uncle Mister Tappan comes."

"No, but Nannie, come here jest a minute," insisted the boy. With a sigh of resignation, she went to him.

"Well, what is it?"

Dannie pointed at the picture in the book.

"Nannie, what is it?"

"Why, it's Adam and Eve in the garden," she answered.

"What're they doin'?"

"Why, they ain't a-doin' nuthin'."

"Well, what are they there fer, then?"

"Say," asked Nannie, "don't you know nuthin' 'bout Adam and Eve?"

Dannie shook his head.

"Didn't ye never read the Bible none?"

"No," said Dannie sadly, "I never read nuthin'."

"Oh, I forgot. You don't read much yet, do you?"

Dannie shook his head again. Nannie looked at him pityingly for a moment, and then said:

"My! But you're an ignoramus, ain't ye?"

Dannie pondered for an instant, then scrambled to his feet, with the Bible clasped tightly under his arm. He marched to the door. In the doorway he turned and wagged his finger solemnly at Nannie.

"Jest fer that I'm goin' in an' tell That Woman ye called me names."

Dannie could never be induced to call Betsy otherwise than "That Woman."

"Why, Dannie," said Nannie, "that ain't a bad name."

"Ain't it?" asked Dannie doubtfully.

"Why, no. That jest means that you ain't educated, that's all."

"Well," he replied, "I s'pose you know, but it sounds turrible."

Dannie seated himself in the Squire's big chair and resumed his study of the pictures. He had turned over several pages, when he came to another that impressed him. He called Nannie again.

"Now, Dannie, I jest can't be botherin' with you all the time."

"Now, Nannie, you know it is your duty to tell me everything I don't know, 'cause Mister Tappan said it wuz."

"Yes, I know, but you don't know nuthin'."

"Why, yes, I do, too."

"All right. What is it you want to know?"

Dannie pointed to the picture in the book.

"What is it?"

"Why, that is Adam and Eve again."

"Mister and Missus Adams?"

"No, I said it was Adam and Eve."

"Then where *is* Missus Adams? I'll bet she'll be mad when she ketches him foolin' 'round with that other woman."

This was a puzzler for Nannie for a moment. But, after a little reflection, she said:

"I guess, come to think of it, Eve wuz Missus Adams."

"Yes," said Dannie, "prob'ly her name wuz Eva Adams."

"Yes," replied Nannie, starting away, "I guess that's it."

"Look! There's a snake a stealin' apples."

Nannie came up to him and looked in the book an instant. Then she drew back, shocked.

"Why, Dannie, that ain't a snake."

"Huh." And Dannie stuck his nose in the air. "I guess I wuz in the circus long enough to know a snake when I see one."

"That is Satan," said she.

"Satan?"

"Yes."

Dannie shook his head. "I never heard of that kind of a snake."

Nannie stood her broom in the corner and marched back to Dannie.

"Now, Dannie, you get up and let me set down there and I'll tell you all about it."

"Well, I think you better," said he, as Nannie took his seat, spread out her skirts, placed the book in her lap and prepared to elucidate the history of Adam and Eve.

"There," she said, pointing to the picture, "that is Adam and that is Eve."

Dannie was all attention. "Yes," he said, "that is Adam and Eve. Eve is the little one so of

course Adam is the one with the whiskers."

"Yes," said she, "and —"

Dannie interrupted her suddenly. "Say, where's their clothes?"

"Why, Dannie!" Nannie looked up at him, shocked.

"Prob'ly some canvassman stole 'em," said Dannie cheerfully.

"Dannie, they didn't wear any clothes."

"They didn't?"

"No."

"Gee! That's wuss'n the circus," said the boy.

Nannie continued: "Now, Adam was the first man that ever was."

"What was his other name?" asked Dannie.

"He didn't have any other name."

"He didn't?"

"No."

"What did folks call him, then?"

"There wa'n't anybody to call him *anything*. He and Eve was all the folks there was in the world."

"Well, then, say, when did all the rest of these folks git here?"

"We are all his children, Dannie."

Dannie grew thoughtful again.

"All Mister Adams' children?"

"Yes."

He thought this over for a while, and then said, half to himself, "Gee! It would be a tough day for a circus, if Mister Adams wuz to come in on a family ticket, wouldn't it?"

He looked into the book again, closely.

"Did you say that feller wuz my father?"

"Yes, Dannie, he was the father of every living being."

"Well, I hope I don't look much like my father. Does it say who my mother wuz, Nannie?"

"Why, Eve wuz your mother," answered Nannie.

"Oh, wuz she Adam's wife?"

"Yes."

"An' they wuz all the people there wuz?"

"Yes."

"Who married them?"

"They didn't git married. The Lord made them already married. They was ready-made married folks, like you get ready-made clothes, you know."

"Oh, yes. So Mister and Missus Adams wuz my father and mother?"

"Yes."

"Why ain't I called Dannie Adams, then?"

"I don't know what your name is. And I think, if you should ask me about it, Dannie, you are a

very careless boy to lose your last name like that, too."

"I don't b'lieve I ever had one to lose, did I?"

"Now, Dannie, you listen and I will tell you the whole thing. They were not born together at all. Adam was born first, and he was all alone for a while. Then he got lonesome and asked the Lord if he couldn't have a wife."

"Geel! Wa'n't he foolish?"

"Well, the Lord didn't have any wives made up yet, and he didn't have anything ready to make 'em of, neither. So he thought a while, and then he put Adam asleep."

Dannie doubled up his fist and placed it under the point of his jaw. "Yes," he said, "right there. I know."

Nannie continued, "The Lord says to him, 'Adam, go to sleep,' an' Adam went to sleep."

"He couldn't help it," said Dannie knowingly.

"No," said Nannie, "an' when he was asleep, the Lord took out one of his ribs, and whittled a wife out of it, and then he blowed on it, and it was alive. Then he set it up beside Adam to dry. An' when Adam woke up, he had a wife. There!"

This was a pretty complicated story for a small boy to comprehend, and Dannie reflected. Finally, he looked up and said:

"He made her out uv one uv Mister Adams' ribs?"

"Yes."

Dannie sat feeling of his own ribs thoughtfully. "Well," he said, finally, "she must have been an awful small wife."

Nannie studied a moment, then said: "Anyhow, they wuz awful happy, till one day Eve ate an apple, off a tree what the Lord had told her not to touch."

"Prob'ly they wa'n't ripe, yet," interrupted Dannie.

"No, I guess not. But, anyway, she ate it, and then they was driven out of the beautiful garden forever and ever. So there, now you know all about it."

Nannie resumed her dusting. Dannie stood where she had left him, still feeling of his own ribs. That idea of making a wife out of a rib puzzled him. All at once he started, and a look of surprise and fear came over his face. He was thoughtful a moment, then gave a gasp.

"Oh! Oh!" he cried.

Nannie turned and, seeing the look of pain on his face, came over to him. "Dannie! Dannie! What is the matter?"

"Oh, oh! I got a pain, Nannie," gasped he.

"Where, Dannie? Where is it?"

"Right there," and Dannie pointed to his side. Suddenly he straightened up, turned and looked at Nannie, his eyes big with awe. "Nannie, I bet I'm goin' to have a wife."

Just at this moment Pauline came to the door of the office. "Where is the Squire?" she asked.

"Here I am," said the Squire, coming in.

"Hullo, Bill Biffins' Baby!" he cried, as he grasped her hand.

"I am afraid I am in your chair, am I not?" said the girl, rising.

"No, no. Set still. You look better in it than I do," and the Squire laughed as he seated himself in another chair. "How ye doin' in school?"

"First rate."

"Licked anybody lately?"

"Not a soul."

"Humph! You're a fine school teacher. Been teachin' school a week, an' hain't licked anybody. Le's see, though. Didn't I hear somethin' 'bout you assaultin' an' batterin' the Silver boy?"

"Oh, I didn't do anything of the kind," answered Pauline indignantly. "He was chewing tobacco in school, and he wouldn't stop, so I took him by the hair and banged his nose on the desk."

"Good. Good for you. It wuz crooked anyway," cried the Squire delightedly.

"Yes, but I wish I hadn't," said Pauline regretfully.

"Why?" demanded the Squire.

"I feel ashamed. It will make so much talk."

The Squire looked at her a moment, then said: "Now, see here, Bill Biffins' Baby. You don't take the proper view of this talkin' bizness. In a town like this, anybody that gives 'em somethin' to talk about is doin' a deed of charity. I s'pose I've been talked about more'n anybody in town. I never did anything of any importance that I didn't git cussed by, at least, half the town. Ye know this world is made up of jest two classes. One half does all that is ever done, an' gits all the cussin'. The other half lays back, and does the cussin'. Now which would you ruther be, the cusser or the cussee?"

Pauline laughed. "Then you think it doesn't hurt any one to be 'cussed,' as you call it?"

"Why, er course it don't. Hain't everybody that ever did anything in the world, been cussed? Don't ye s'pose folks cussed Noah, while he was buildin' the Ark? An' don't ye s'pose they cussed 'im a good deal wuss, when the high water come, an' they went up to the door of the ark, and found a card on the door, sayin', 'No Admittance'? Didn't they cuss the Saviour fer everything he done? Didn't they cuss Abraham Lincoln when he freed

the slaves? An' fer that matter, ain't the Democrats cussin' fer it yet. Ye hain't hurt nuthin'. Don't ye be worried 'bout folks cussin' ye. An' ye've got the best behaved school we ever had in town. I ain't sure but I'll adopt your idee myself in dealin' with some folks 'round here."

"All right, then." She smiled and started to the door, then turned back. She hesitated a minute, then asked, in a low voice, "Mr. Tappan,"—the Squire looked up—"you—you haven't heard anything from out West, have you?"

"No, not a line. Have you?"

Pauline shook her head slowly. "Perhaps—perhaps he doesn't wish to write to me."

"Oh, git out," said the Squire. "He's a pooty, big fool, but he hain't so bad as that."

"Yes, but I have written him three letters," said she.

"Yes, I've writ two myself," answered the Squire. "An' ef he don't write pooty soon, I'm goin' to borry that gun o' yours, an' go out there after 'im."

"All right," said Pauline, "and when you do, I'll go with you."

"Yes, I guess I'd have to take you along to git much benefit out o' that gun."

Pauline laughed. "Well, I am going out to

gather some Golden-rod for the fireplace. I'll be back for dinner. Good-by."

"Good-by," said he, standing in the doorway, looking after her, as she went down the road.

"I swan!" he exclaimed. "I don't see how Bill Biffins ever got such a sweet daughter. Looks a leetle like her grandmother used to, too, across the eyes."

He sat in a reverie for a moment, then pulled himself together and, taking up an old quill pen, began to write. The hum of the birds and the bees came in at the window, mingled with the whispering of the breezes among the trees. A hesitating step outside made him look up. In the doorway, stood Ben Gould. The Squire jumped to his feet, with a glad cry.

"Why, Ben! Where in thunder did ye come from? Lord bless your heart. I'm glad to see ye. Come right into the house."

"No, no. Wait a minute, Uncle," said Ben, drawing back, pulling the Squire with him, into the office, and closing the door.

"Wait a minute!" repeated the Squire in surprise. "What ye want to wait a minute fer? Ain't ye goin' in to see your mother?"

"No, Uncle Bill, I can't see mother this time," replied Ben, his eyes lowering.

"What!" said the Squire. "You can't see your mother? Why not?"

Ben threw his shoulders back and looked the old man full in the face.

"Uncle Bill, I am in trouble, bitter trouble. And I — I — must go away!"

"Go away, eh?" asked the Squire. "That's a bad way to git out o' trouble, boy, runnin' away from it."

"Oh, it isn't that exactly," said Ben, "but I have got to go away to — well, to find some one."

The Squire stood thinking for a time, then looked at Ben.

"Ben, what ye been doin'? Come on, now; 'fess up."

"I haven't done a thing wrong," said Ben. "But — well, Uncle Bill, I am suspected of something, and I can't —"

Ben stopped, nervously.

The Squire observed him keenly. "Who suspects ye, and what do they suspect ye of?" he asked.

Ben swallowed a lump in his throat before he could go on. "Uncle, I can't tell anything about it."

"Ye can't tell *me*, Ben?" asked the old man.

"Oh, I wish I could, Uncle; I wish I could, but I can't."

"Well," answered the Squire, in his philosophical

way, " ef ye can't why ye can't, an' there's the end on't."

" But Uncle Bill, I am innocent. I swear it."

" God bless ye, Ben, you don't have to swear nuthin' to me. I know ye hain't done nuthin' very bad." The Squire laid his hand on Ben's shoulder.

" You see, Uncle," Ben went on, " this is not exactly my secret. It is something that somebody else has done to somebody else. You understand, don't you? "

" Oh, yes, yes," the Squire replied. " That's plain enough. Somebody has done something to somebody else, and you have got to go somewhere to do something for somebody else. That's plain as A. B. C."

" Yes," said Ben, in an absent minded way, " I thought you would understand." He stood thinking for a moment, and then looked up suddenly, " Uncle Bill," he went on, " have you got any money handy? "

" Well, I guess I hain't worryin' Gould or Rockafeller any, but I've got a little. Got a hundred and forty dollars cash. I sold John Sawtelle that yoke of two-year-old steers yist'day."

" Will you let me have a hundred of it? " asked Ben anxiously.

" How much? " cried the Squire, in dismay.

" A hundred dollars," replied Ben.

"Where in thunder be ye goin'? To Africa?"

"No — I have to go — out West."

"Out West?" and the Squire looked at him closely.

"Yes."

The Squire stood, intently observing him. He had taken from his inside pocket a stamped envelope, which he had not yet opened. He went up to the door and looked out to see that no one was listening. Then he came back and said to Ben:

"Out West, eh?"

Ben nodded affirmatively.

The Squire went on.

"Out West to Leadville, Coloradie? Ain't that it?"

"What made you think that?" asked Ben, surprised.

"It don't make no difference what made me think so, but I do. Yer goin' out there to look fer Will, ain't ye?"

"Will?" said Ben, agitated. "What makes you think Will is out there?"

"I don't think it, I know it. Now come, Ben, tell me all about it. I never failed ye yet, did I?"

"Oh, Uncle Bill, it isn't that. I would give anything to tell you and have you help me. But I can't. It isn't anything you can help. It is something I have got to fight out alone."

The Squire nodded. "All right, Ben."

He opened the envelope and drew out the money he had received for the two-year-olds.

"When do ye want to start?"

"Now. This minute," said Ben eagerly.

The Squire stopped counting the money and looked up. "What be ye goin' to start on? There ain't no train till to-night."

"I am going to walk to South Newbury and get somebody to drive me over to Potter Place. I can catch that two o'clock train West."

The Squire counted the money over again, handed it to Ben, saying: "All right, there's your hundred dollars."

Ben took the money and was just starting to recount it, when he happened to notice the envelope. As the Squire was about to replace it in his pocket, he reached out suddenly, taking the envelope from the Squire's hands, and noticed the address upon it. It was addressed to "J. C. Haines, Boston, Mass., Dealer in Musical Instruments."

The Squire snatched the envelope, in a half ashamed sort of way.

"Here, now —" he exclaimed.

"Oh, Uncle. This was for the clarinet!"

"'Twa'n't nuther," said the Squire indignantly.

"I wuz jest writin' fer a catalog on — on — band music."

Ben was trying hard to control his voice as he replied:

"Uncle Bill, if this was for myself, I wouldn't touch a penny, but it is for somebody else and I must have it."

"Oh, don't ye worry 'bout me," said the Squire, bravely, as he took four ten dollar bills from the envelope and displayed them to Ben. I've got forty left, yit, an' I kin git t'other twenty easy enough. An' now, if you're figurin' on ketchin' that two o'clock train out of Potter Place, ye better be gittin' along. You're sure you don't think ye better see your mother?"

"I couldn't stand it. Just let me go now, and I will come back just as soon as I can, and tell you all about it."

"All right. All right," said the Squire.

"Good-by, Uncle Bill!" Ben held out both hands.

"Good-by, Ben!" The old man grasped his hands. The two stood looking straight into each other's eyes a moment. The old man was looking to see if there was the slightest indication of guilt in Ben's eyes. But what he saw there satisfied him. He shook Ben's hands again, led him to the door, looked out to see if the coast was clear, then with one more parting shake Ben was gone.

The Squire watched him out of sight, then came

back into the office, sat down in his old chair, put his feet upon the table, lit a stub of a cigar, and tried to reason it all out. For Ben, himself, he was not concerned. He had no uneasiness for Ben. But if the trouble he had spoken of took him out West, the chances were that Will was mixed up in it, some way.

Both the boys had made a confidant of the Squire since childhood. He could not make it seem right to be left in ignorance, if there was trouble. He simply could not believe that Ben had done anything wrong, but if Ben was in trouble in New York, how could Will be mixed up in it, when he was out in Leadville? Had Will come East? This might account for the absence of letters. Yet if Will was not out West, why was Ben going out there?

The Squire studied over it and smoked a whole cigar while deliberating. Finally he rose, threw the end of the cigar into the fireplace, pushed his old hat back on his head and said determinedly:

"Well, I don't care if they *are* wrong, they're right, jest the same."

CHAPTER XV

THE Squire sat in his office with his feet upon the table, a half-burned cigar in his mouth, puzzling over the hurried visit of the boy who could not tell him his trouble after all the years of complete confidence.

The letter addressed to "J. C. Haines & Co., Boston," still lay there on the table beside him. The four ten-dollar bills still lay in the wallet, awaiting the coming of the other twenty, which would make the longed-for clarinet a reality. He had just relit an overworked cigar and started off on another train of thought, when the cry of "Uncle Mister Tappan! Uncle Mister Tappan!" came to his ears. It was drawing nearer every second, so the Squire concluded there was no need shifting his easy position.

Nannie rushed in and between her gasps for breath told the Squire that Dannie had been kicked by the horse. "He was a-lyin' on his stomik, an' Tom Flinders was rubbin' axle grease into him." For a moment the Squire was alarmed, but at that instant Dannie came limping in.

"Please, sir, I fergot somethin'!" said the boy.

"No!" The Squire appeared staggered by the information.

"Yes, sir!"

"Dannie, I can't believe it."

"Well, I did, just the same."

"What wuz it?"

Dannie pulled his hand out of his pocket and held out a blue envelope.

"I forgot this letter. A woman down at the depot gave it to me, an' I put it in this pocket here."

Dannie showed by his gesture that he had originally placed the letter in his hip pocket. "An' then I fergot it, an' when Tom was a-lookin' to see if your hoss had busted anything, he found the letter, an' he told me to come right up with it."

The Squire took the letter and stood looking at the boy grimly.

"When wuz this?"

"Yist'day."

"Yes, or the day before, or the day before that," said the Squire. "Young man, you are a tender flower. You are, in a measure, in my care, an' I should hate to see anything happen to you, to mar the even tenor of your, young life," he continued. "But — if you ever again — as long as you live — tech one of my letters — I'll — I'll — take ye all

apart an' sew ye together ag'in, wrong side out, an' backside frontwards."

"Yes, sir," said Dannie calmly.

"Well, that's all. You can go," said the Squire.

Dannie lost no time in suiting the action to the word.

The Squire went back to his old chair, sat down and opened the envelope. As he pulled out the letter, a greenback fell out.

"Hello! There's money in it!" said he, as he picked it up and unfolded it. "An' a twenty-dollar bill! I'll bet I've opened one uv Rockafeller's letters!"

He turned the envelope over and read the address again.

"No, it's fer me, all right."

He sat on the edge of the table and read:

"DEAR MR. TAPPEN:

"I am in great trouble."

"There, see that? I tell ye it runs in streaks!"

"I am in great trouble and wish to consult you on a very delicate legal matter. I enclose twenty dollars as a retaining fee. I will call on you to-morrow afternoon.

"Yours,

"Katheryne Ethel Gordon."

"Well," said the Squire, "that's the gal that wuz

up here visitin' last summer — an' to-morrow's to-day."

The Squire's brow began to frown.

"I wonder if her trouble has got anything to do with Ben's trouble?"

He thought for a moment and chuckled.

"Twenty dollars for a retaining fee! Gosh! That's an awful lot to know about law."

The old man started.

"Why —" He reached in his pocket and pulled out the envelope, in which were the four ten-dollar bills. The envelope was already addressed to the music dealer in Boston. "My clarinet is a reality ag'in," he said. "I know what I'm goin' to do. I'm goin' to mail this letter before any one else comes along an' gits this money away from me!"

He reached the door and was just about to step outside, when Kate Gordon came in at the gate and hurried to the office.

"Well, sufferin' Sciatica!" exclaimed the Squire. "How do you do?"

He held out his hand. Kate grasped it, as she said: "How do you do, Mr. Tappan!"

"Come right in here and sit down," said he, as he hung up his hat and placed a chair for her on the opposite side of the table.

"You mustn't mind anything I do," he went on. "You see, this letter o' yourn, with the twenty-dol-

lar bill in it, was sech a dretful shock that it kind o' upshot me."

Kate viewed him in a puzzled way, and then exclaimed: "Oh, I see, I have made a mistake!"

"Yes," was the quick reply, "I guess ye did."

Kate was fumbling in her purse and the Squire was slowly drawing the twenty-dollar bill from the envelope. At the same moment the Squire turned and held out the bill to her, she turned, and held out another twenty-dollar bill to him, saying:

"It wasn't enough!"

He drew back, looked curiously at her, and said: "No, you're takin' dretful long chances on the fust twenty. Don't plunge any further. Now, you set down there, an' tell me what on airth it is that you think I know twenty dollars' worth about."

He placed the bill in the envelope and Kate returned the other bill to her purse as they sat down.

"Now," said the Squire, "what do you want?"

Kate hung her head for a moment and her face flushed crimson. Then, in a low voice, she replied:

"I want to see about getting a divorce!"

"Gittin' what?" gasped the Squire.

"A divorce," was the firm response.

The Squire looked at her in surprise.

"Say," he said finally, "you're backin' in. You

mean you want to git married fust, don't ye?"

"No. I am already married — secretly married. But — I — made a mistake."

"It is kind uv an eyeopener, ain't it? It's funny, though, I never heard nuthin' 'bout your bein' married."

"But you forget. I told you I was *secretly* married. No one but my husband, the city clerk, the minister and his wife know of it."

The Squire sat stroking his chin. "Um! Don't think much o' these secret marriages."

"Then help me to get out of this one," she responded with energy. In a pleading voice she continued: "Oh,— Mr. Tappan, you will take my case, won't you?"

"Oh, Thunder! Yes," said he, hurriedly rising and going over to his desk.

"Lordy!" he said to himself. "For twenty dollars I'd take a case o' smallpox."

He took out a small notebook and resumed his seat.

"There now, we'll start right in at the beginnin'. Now, fust an' foremost, what is your husband's name?"

No answer.

"I say," said he, raising his voice, thinking she perhaps had not understood him, "what is your husband's name?"

Kate hung her head, as she replied: "I—I cannot tell you."

He laid down his notebook, sat back with his hands on the arms of his chair, and eyed her in amazement.

"You can't tell me?"

"No!"

"You can't tell me your husband's name?"

"No!"

"An' ye expect me to git ye a divorce?"

Kate only hung her head lower.

"Humph! Ye must have a pooty, exalted opinion o' my legal ability, to think I kin git ye a divorce without knowin' yer husband's name."

"Oh, Mr. Tappan, don't be angry with me. Can't you understand what a terrible position I am in? No one knows that I am married. Even my own father is ignorant of the fact. My husband's people don't know it. I am breaking my word even to tell you I am married. Something has occurred that makes it imperative that I should get a divorce. I can't go to one of our New York lawyers. I don't wish to hurt my husband. I don't wish to hurt any one. I simply want to be free."

The Squire sat in deep thought. He saw—or thought he saw—through the whole thing. He looked up and asked: "Where're ye stoppin' here?"

The Squire was not particularly interested in her abiding place, but wished to get her mind off the subject immediately in hand for a few moments to quiet her.

"I am stopping at Mrs. Silver's," she replied.

"An' did ye notice how Bill is failin'?" asked the Squire.

"Yes, indeed; he looks awful. Why, the man is dying by inches."

"Yes," answered the Squire, with a sigh, "too bad, an' he's sech a tall feller, too. Lordy! It don't seem more'n yist'day that Bill wuz married, nuther. There. I'll bet you never heard o' Bill's weddin', did ye?"

"No," said Kate, detecting the Squire's purpose. "No, I believe I never did."

"Now, let's see," said the Squire. "Your father's livin', ain't he?"

"Yes, sir."

"And your mother?"

"Dead."

"Oh, that's too bad. Now, you live in New York, I b'lieve?"

"Yes, sir, or, rather, I am a suburbanite."

The Squire sat back in a quandary. "Is that so? On your father's side, or your mother's?"

Kate laughed. "I mean I live outside the city."

"Oh, yes. I should think you'd git a divorce

from your home, instead o' your husband." He sat and regarded her gravely for a moment, then asked, "What did you git married fer in the fust place?"

"Because I loved my husband," answered Kate, flashing.

"Um. Well, that's reason enough, I guess," said the Squire. "But what in thunder did ye want to do it secretly fer? Why didn't ye git married right out loud, the way other folks do?"

"Because — well — because my husband would not consent to it."

The Squire looked at her in amazement. "He wouldn't?"

"No."

The Squire continued to look at her. How any man could refuse to marry this girl was beyond his comprehension. She had everything that could make her desirable. She was young, rich, beautiful and intelligent.

"What was your husband, a fool?"

"Worse. Worse than a fool."

The Squire sighed and leaned back, fearing that tears were coming.

"Well," he resumed, "go ahead. How long since it happened?"

Kate looked up. "Since what happened?"

"Since he beat ye?"

"Beat? What kind of a husband do you think I married?"

"Why, I don't know. Ye seem dretful anxious to git rid uv him."

"My husband is, at least, a gentleman."

"Good. I didn't know but what he wuz a lady. So he never beat ye?"

"Certainly not."

"Um! Gets drunk, I s'pose?"

"I suppose he does *not*."

"Gambils?"

"No!"

"Commits Brigham-Youngery?"

"No! No! No!"

"Well, then," he went on, "what in thunder did your husband do, or didn't do, that you expect me to git a divorce fer ye?"

For a moment Kate sat undecided, then her whole frame agitated, and her face ablaze with indignation, she said:

"I will tell you why I want a divorce. Because I have discovered that my husband is a thief. That's why! Because he has robbed my father of money. That's why I want a divorce!"

"Oh, no, no," said the Squire, "perhaps you're mistaken."

"I am not mistaken. I accused him of it to his face and he did not dare to deny it! He could not

say a word in his own defense. He simply hung his head and said nothing. Then he ran away like a coward."

Kate had worked herself into a passion and burst into tears.

"That's it," said the Squire to himself, "that's it. It wuz her husband that Ben meant. He's run away an' Ben's gone after him. That's why he wouldn't tell me about it. He didn't want to shame this gal by lettin' me know her husband wuz a thief."

The Squire heaved a sigh. It was a great source of relief to know, as he now thought he knew, that the cause of all this trouble was somebody other than Will or Ben. This sense of gratitude made him more lenient toward the unknown husband. He watched Kate until the sobs subsided, then said to himself: "That gal don't know her own heart. If she hated this husband as bad as she thinks she does, she wouldn't be cryin' like that. Her pride is hurt a dern sight wuss'n her heart is. I guess we better feel our way 'long a little further before we issue any ultimatums."

He went over to the bookcase, saying: "Well, we'll consult the statutes an' see what the law has to say on this point. Now you kind o' turn off the water works, there. Brace up an' see if you don't

think about the best thing you kin do is to tell me who an' what this husband o' yourn is."

Kate turned and looked at the Squire. "I can't tell this dear old man that his nephew is a thief," she thought. "It would break his poor, old heart. And I can't go to any other lawyer. He must help me."

The Squire had by this time planned his course of action. He drew a huge legal volume from the bookcase and stood reading the title aloud, "Arson, Manslaughter, Murder."

"There," he ejaculated, as he resumed his seat. "I guess that comes as near your case as any book I have got. Now we'll see what Brother Blackstone has to say about it."

He opened the book and, after turning a few pages, said:

"Here we are! Now listen:

"The judge shall, upon conviction, sentence the accused to be confined in the State Prison, for the rest of his natural life."

Kate placed her hand over the page and, through her tears, said:

"But, Mr. Tappan, I don't want my husband sent to prison. That is why I have come up here to you. I want only a divorce. I want to save him from prison."

was getting excited and knew it was no way to present convincing arguments. He waited a minute, then went on more quietly:

"See here! When you stood up with that man, whoever he is, before a minister of God, and took that marriage obligation, you took the solemnest obligation there is on earth. I know it's gittin' so it ain't considered so, now-a-days, but it is. You swore to stick to him through health and sickness, for better for worse, and even if he *made* a mistake, even if he *has* stolen something, even if he commits all the crimes there is on the calendar, you ain't the one to turn on him. Out of all the folks there is in the world, you are the one to stick to him. P'raps the very thing he done wrong, he done for you. Now, you look here! You have come here for a lawyer's opinion. You take an old man's advice instid. I'm goin' to tell ye somethin' I never told a human bein' before. Somethin' I didn't think I ever would tell anybody. But — well, I stood right where you are standin' once, at the branchin' o' two roads. I took the wrong road, an' I don't want you to do it."

The Squire paused for a moment. While they had been talking, darkness had crept in through the dusty panes. Then the moonlight, shining first upon the roof of the little office, came slowly creeping down the moss-covered shingles, over the eaves

and down across the weather-beaten clapboards, until now, it shone in at the window. It came in through the vines and rested on the bowed shoulders of the young girl, passed on and fell upon the old man, lighting his snow-white hair, until it looked like a halo about his head.

"Now, my girl," he went on, "you are doin' the best you kin to make a mistake. Don't! It don't take but a little time to make a mistake — it takes an awful long time to unmake one." The old man stopped for a moment, then continued sadly, "I made one once, an' it ain't unmade yit. I — I loved somebody once; somebody as sweet an' as pooty as you be. An' we wuz goin' to 'git married, jest the same as you did. An' — we — quarreled. Quarreled jest the same as you are tryin' to do. An' when I got 'round to make it up — it — was — too — late."

For an instant he sat silent, then threw back his head and said bitterly: "And now look at me! The most pitiful thing on God's green earth — a lonely, homeless old man. I have seen the friends of my childhood grow up and get their homes, homes where their wives meet 'em at the door, with a smile, when they come home at night, homes where their little children run 'way down the road on their wobbly, unsteady, little legs, to ride back on Daddie's shoulder. I see 'em! I see 'em every day, every

night. And then — I come back here — alone. I tell ye, Miss, that's an awful word — 'alone.'

"I set down in front of the old fireplace there an' in its lights and shadders I seem to see my wife, my home, and my children. The fire burns lower and lower and soon one of the logs burns in two and falls into the ashes. Away goes my home, in a shower of sparks, leavin' only the ashes of regret behind. That's what a mistake cost me, Miss. Don't — you — make — a — mistake!"

The girl was sobbing softly. The old man sat for a moment looking at her intently. His eyes gleamed and glistened with the memories of days gone by. In the place of this girl, he saw that other girl, who, perhaps, if she had known some one who would have given her a word of advice, might not have made the mistake which had brought the words, "It might have been," into his life.

He picked up the envelope which lay upon the table and gazed at it longingly. It was hard, but his life had been made up of hardships. Perhaps, if some one, years ago, had done some such little thing, that other girl —

With a sigh he rose and went to the door. The village street lay flooded in the moonlight. Up the road and across the field, the Silver home shone white in the moonbeams. In one of the windows a single light burned, as if it were a beacon, burn-

ing, to guide the girl back to peace and happiness.

He sighed softly, then turning to the girl, spoke: "Come here, Miss. Come here," he said.

The girl looked up with swimming eyes.

"What is it?" she asked brokenly.

"Come here," he repeated.

The girl rose and came to him and together they stood there in the moonlit doorway. The Squire pointed across the fields to the Silver home, with its single, gleaming light.

"You see that little house over there, don't ye?" he asked.

"Yes," said the girl. Her voice was scarcely above a whisper.

The old man softly withdrew the twenty-dollar bill from the envelope and pressed it into the girl's hand.

"Le's see how quick you kin git over there!" he said. She looked at him in surprise. "An' then," he went on, "le's see how quick you kin write to your husband. Tell him that it has been all your fault and you're sorry."

"But it isn't my fault!" said the girl brokenly.

"Well, then, lie about it! 'Twon't hurt ye a mite."

The girl stood looking down and thinking. Then she gave a start. For the first time she noticed the

twenty-dollar bill which he had placed in her hand. Quickly she looked at him, then held out the bill.

"But this money," she said. "I can't take that. It is yours."

"Why, no it ain't, nuther! I ain't done nuthin' for it."

"Mr. Tappan," the girl looked at him earnestly, "perhaps you have done more than you thought."

"Well," said the Squire, "I ginerally do, one way or the other. But now, see here, you are on mighty dangerous ground, foolin' 'round here with that twenty-dollar bill. Please go home."

For a moment they stood there, looking into each other's eyes. Then the girl held out her hand.

"Mr. Tappan," she said, "I will take your advice."

"Good! Good!"

"I can't promise to do *all* you ask, but I will — wait. I will give him a chance to explain. Good-night! And — thank you."

Standing there in the moonlight of the summer's night, the white-haired old man watched her pass out through the gate and down the village street. In the window beyond, the beacon light still burned. He looked at the envelope in his hand. There would be no divorce. There would be no clarinet. Slowly he tore the envelope and the letter into strips.

"Well!" He threw his head back defiantly and said slowly: "Prob'ly I couldn't a played the dern thing anyway," then went back into the darkened office, to dream of other years.

CHAPTER XVI

THE Squire was up early next day. Ben's trouble was saddled upon some one else and he felt more at peace with the world and more in the spirit of work.

Betsy was busy in the house with her ironing. Pauline, Dannie and Nannie were at school. The field was clear for the Squire to send out a pile of tax bills which were on the table.

The door opened, admitting Mrs. William Silver.

"Good mornin', William!" said she.

The Squire sprang to his feet. "W'y, hullo, Mis' Silver. Got ye to comin' to the lawyers, have we? Goin' to make your will, git a divorce or have somebody 'rested?"

"No, no!" she exclaimed as she took the chair the Squire placed for her. "I jest come over to ask ye a question or two."

"All right!" said the Squire, "you ask anything ye want to, an' I'll answer ye — p'raps."

"Well," said she, "I jest wanted to ask ye about this Gordon gal."

The Squire looked at her curiously. "Why, what about her?" he asked.

"Well, she kinder wants to engage board with me fer a spell."

"Well?"

"Well, William — ye know I'm a respectable woman."

"Ye can't prove nuthin' by me," said the Squire cautiously.

"Now, William, ye know I be. An' I've a growin' fam'ly, an' I don't want to do nuthin' that ain't right. Now do I?"

He looked at her curiously for a minute, then he sat back. "Say, what in thunder are ye drivin' at anyway? As fer as I know, ye *are* a perfectly respectable, female person. As fer as my judgment goes, your fam'ly *is* growin'! An' as fer as I know, you do *not* want to do anything wrong. Now what has your good reputation and intentions got to do with this gal wantin' to engage board with you?"

"Well, William, this is a dretful embarrassin' position for a self-respectin' head of a family to be placed in."

"What is?" asked the Squire.

"Why this gal, William."

"Well, what's the matter with her? You boarded her last summer, didn't ye?"

"Yes."

"An' she paid her board, didn't she?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, what's the matter with her?"

"Well, it was different last summer, William."

"But, *how* was it different?"

"Well, you know her brother was with her last summer."

"What difference does that make?" The Squire was getting impatient. "Why don't ye out with it, an' stop beatin' about the bush?"

"Well, now, William, you know I'm a respectable woman, an'—"

"Well, gol blame it! Go on an' be respectable. I ain't interferin' with your bein' respectable, am I? An' the girl is respectable, too, ain't she?"

"Well, I don't know whether she is or not."

The Squire realized the full meaning of the word respectable. He had not thought of this view of the case before and saw, in a minute, the trouble ahead. In a small village like Bradford, any one's business is everybody's business. There is no room for secrecy or mystery.

The Squire removed the cigar from his lips and critically examined the end of it. "Um! So ye don't know whether she is respectable or not, eh? What has happened to unsettle your convictions?"

There was no answer. The Squire spoke a little sharper. "Come on now! You know you can't say anything like that without sayin' more. What did ye mean by that remark?"

"Well, William." The woman threw her head back and looked at the Squire anxiously. "That gal sez she is married!"

"Well," said he, "what of it? That ain't nuthin' wuss'n you done yerself, is it?"

"Yes, but I have got a husband."

"Well, good Lordy! Don't ye s'pose she has? Ye don't s'pose she got married all alone, do ye?"

"Then where is he?" demanded Mrs. Silver triumphantly.

"You better ask her that," said the Squire dryly.

"I did."

"What did she say?"

"She said she wa'n't prepared to state jest yit."

"Well," said the Squire slowly, "she ought to know."

"But if she has got a husband, why don't she say where he is and who he is?"

The Squire looked at her a moment and then said: "Now look here, Mrs. Bill Silver, I don't want to say nuthin' unneighborly nor impolite, but will you inform me what bizness 'tis o' yourn whether this gal is married or single? Who her husband is or where he is?"

"Yes," and Mrs. Silver's eyes blazed dangerously. "Yes. If you are bound to know, I'll tell ye. Here is a young woman that your nephew brings up here a-visitin' last summer, a year ago.

She throws money 'round jest as if it grew on trees. She gives my boy William ten cents every time he turns 'round fer her. She wears better clo'es out a-fishin' than I ever had in my life. She has di'monds on her hands that must 'a' cost every cent uv a hundred dollars apiece. Then she wuz jest Miss Gordon. Now, she comes up here, all alone, shows a weddin' ring, an' sez she is married! She don't say who her husband is. She don't say where he is. She don't say what his name is. She don't show no certificate. She jest sez she's married, an' her name is still jest plain 'Miss Gordon.' She ain't Missus nuthin'. An' she wants to engage board at my house. If I, the mother uv seven children, am any jedge of sech things, she'll be here at the very time that she ought to be with her own folks. An' if her husband is ever goin' to be with her, he ought to be with her along about now. But, instid uv that, she wants to be up here alone—among strangers. Now! Is it any uv my bizness whether she is married or not?"

During this tirade the Squire sat motionless. By the time Mrs. Silver had reached the end of her arraignment, the Squire had sized up the puritanical strictness which years before had burned women at the stake for witchcraft, branded them with the scarlet letter and which was not all dead yet. In the books upon his shelves, the highest legal au-

thorities stated that a person was innocent until proven guilty. But, to the dwellers in these rock-bound towns and villages, the accused, especially if a woman, is guilty until proven innocent. He knew that this girl was a wife. But they did not know it. He knew also that she could not, or would not, tell them what they would demand to know. Whatever the cost to her, she would not betray her husband. Once let the Squire become convinced that a lie was necessary and he could forget that honesty was the best policy, and tackle a lie with energy and conscientious endeavor. The present case struck him as one requiring some scientific lying. He did not deceive himself with any claim of twisting the truth. What was needed here was plain, unvarnished lying. He must make this woman, this mouthpiece of all the others, believe absolutely that Kate was what he knew her to be; an honest wife. But as he could not accomplish this by telling the truth, he determined to do the next best thing and lie. The old hat went back on his head. His mind was made up.

"Well," he exclaimed, "what was it you wanted to know?"

"I want to know if this girl is really married, fer one thing," said Mrs. Silver.

"Ye-us," said the Squire quietly, "she is married."

"When?"

"The nineteenth of August, a year ago."

"Where?" demanded Mrs. Silver.

Just at that moment he happened to glance at a newspaper lying on the table before him. His eyes rested on a news item stating that a ship had been launched at Kennebunk, Maine, the day before.

"At Kennebunk, Maine," he answered promptly.

"What is her husband's name?"

"Parrafetti," said the Squire calmly. He had never heard of such a name before in his life, but he had to say something, so he simply pronounced the first name that occurred to him.

"Parrafetti?" exclaimed Mrs. Silver. "What is he, Eyetalian?"

"No! French."

"Humph!" Mrs. Bill grunted. "I don't think much uv these furrin marriages."

"Neither do I, as a ginerall rule," the Squire admitted, "but this is different. Ye see, Parrafetti's father was a furriner, but his mother was the daughter of a lobster fisherman in Kennebunk, Maine. Parrafetti's father was an Austrian Dook—'n—"

"Austrian? Thought you said he was a Frenchman?"

"Well, what uv it?" demanded the Squire. "A man kin be born in France, an' move away, can't he? He don't have to live in France all his life, if he

don't want to, does he? You was born up to Blodgett's Landin', wa'n't ye? But you didn't stay there."

"No!" said Mrs. Silver doubtfully.

"Well, this feller didn't, nuther. He moved to Austria an' went into the army. An' at the battle of Waterloo, he fit so hard, that the Queen of Austria made him a Dook. The Third Assistant Dook of Austria, he was."

The Squire drew a long breath and went on hurriedly, before she could ask further questions.

"About the time the war broke out here, this Third Assistant Dook of Austria, was sent to this country, to see if he couldn't get a job in our Navy, an' as they was buildin' a lot o' battleships down at Kennebunk, Maine, he sailed fer there. Well, sir, jest as the ship was comin' into the harbor of Kennebunk, a fearful storm came up and the ship was wrecked. Every soul on board was lost except this Third Assistant Dook. He was jest a'goin' down fer the last time, when this lobster fisherman and his daughter came along in a rowboat."

"What wuz a girl doin' out in a rowboat in sech a storm?" demanded Mrs. Silver.

The Squire looked at her angrily. "Because her father's wrist wuz sore an' he couldn't row the boat, an' the lobsters had been bitin' good that night, an' ef he didn't go out an' take 'em off the hooks, the

sword fish would come along an' eat 'em all up in the mornin'. Well, this gal see the Third Assistant Dook of Australia goin'—"

"Austria, you mean," put in Mrs. Silver.

"Er — ye-us, Austria. She seen him goin' down fer the last time, an' knowin' her father couldn't swim with that lame wrist, she jumped in an' saved his life. Well, when he come to, he insisted on marryin' the gal. She didn't want to at first, but he insisted, an' so they wuz married. Then he went away to the war an' wuz killed on a gun boat at Antietam, as they wuz tryin' to go up the Mississippi River to Harper's Ferry. So when this young — er — er —"

"Parrafetti," prompted Mrs. Bill.

"Yes. Parrafetti," said the Squire gratefully. "When he wuz born, he grew up there in Kennebunk, Maine. But, havin' inherited his father's title of Third Assistant Dook of Austria, of course he wuz quite a feller. An' when he an' this Kate Gordon met, it wuz a case of love at first sight. An', as I told ye, they wuz married on the — er — er — the date I told ye."

The Squire sat back, happy in the consciousness of a deed well done.

"But why do they want to keep it a secret?" asked Mrs. Bill.

"Ah! There! Now ye come to the milk in the

cocoanut!" said he impressively. "That is the p'int that the whole thing hinges on! That is where I, as a lawyer, come in. Ye see, accordin' to the laws of Australia —"

"Austria!" corrected Mrs. Silver.

"Austria, I should say," the Squire went on. "Accordin' to the laws of Austria, a Dook cannot marry before he is twenty-eight."

"Why not?" demanded Mrs. Silver.

"Why, because up to that time he — is — er — a — well, only a sort of a goslin'. A Dook only becomes a full Dook when he is twenty-eight years old. An' this Kate's property wuz willed to her by her grandfather, old Colonel Vanderbilt, on condition she should be married before she was twenty-four. Now ye see, if she didn't git married last August, a year ago, she would lose her property, an' if the Dook *did* git married before next January, he would lose his Dookism — his Dookness — er — his — why, his job as Dook, ye know. Now what wuz they to do? They loved each other with a devotion that was — er — devotion itself. Now I put it to you, Mrs. Silver, what would you 'a' done?"

"Well, I don't know," said Mrs. Bill with a sigh, "I guess I'd a married him."

"Course ye would!" cried the Squire triumphantly. "An' married 'im secretly, wouldn't ye?"

"I dunno but what I would," she admitted.

"Well, I guess ye would," said the Squire, "an' that's exactly what she did. An' now jest think uv the honor she is doin' ye, to want to come up here to your house at this time. Jest think, in years to come, in the Courts of Europe, when somebody wants to know who the present Third Assistant Dook of Austria is, or how old he is, or what his full name is, or anything like that, an' they look in the Dook book an' read that 'The Third Assistant Dook of Austria was born at William Silver's house, at Bradford, New Hampshire, U. S. A.'; jest think of it!"

"Well," said Mrs. Silver, rising with a pleased smile on her face, "of course I shall be very pleased to do anything I can for a friend of yours, William. I jest wanted to be sure it was all right." She started toward the door.

"Yes. An' here!"

Mrs. Silver stopped and the Squire went to her. "Now ye know that this has all got to be kept very confidential."

"Why certainly, William."

"Ye know the Dookdom of Austria depends on your keepin' all this I have told ye to yerself, fer awhile, ye know. Jest you and I know it; not another soul. If it gits out it is either you or me that has done it. Kin I trust ye?"

"William, I won't tell a soul."

"That's right, Mattie. An' one o' these days

you an' I will have the dearest of all human privileges of sayin', 'I tol' ye so, I knew it all the time!' So now you go 'long an' tell the gal to settle right down comfortable at your house an' you do the best you kin fer 'er."

"All right, William, an' I thank ye fer the trust ye have placed in me. Good-by!" Mrs. Bill went back home, prepared to fight the good fight to the death for Kate's good name.

The Squire watched her out through the gate and out of sight down the road. Then he sat down in the old chair, took off his hat, and wiped his damp forehead. For a moment he sat motionless, then he muttered: "I'll bet I am the wu'st liar that ever lived! Compared to me, Ananias was a cheap amachure."

CHAPTER XVII

THE Squire sat, tipped back in his old chair, reviewing the events of the past, as he often did at twilight. It was a week or ten days since Mrs. Bill Silver had listened to his wonderful "Dook" story.

The door opened and Silas Dalby stepped in.

"Hello, Silas! Come in," said the Squire. "Sit down."

Silas closed the door and came in.

"What's the news?"

"Oh, I dunno 's I know anythin' 'specially new," said Silas.

"Well, I'm glad o' that," said the Squire. "By Gosh! I've heard so many mysterious things lately that I'm skeered to death every time anybody opens their mouth."

"Yes," replied Silas, crossing his legs and swinging his foot. "You hear quite a lot, I guess."

"Ye-us," answered the Squire, "there ain't much goes on that don't come to me, sooner or later."

"Um!" said Silas. Then after a pause, he went on: "I see that Gordon gal is up here ag'in!"

"Ye-us!" said the Squire.

"Seems to be a pooty nice gal," said Silas in a studiously careless way.

"Ye-us!"

"Goin' to stay awhile, I hear," said Silas.

"Ye-us!" said the Squire.

There was an embarrassing silence. The Squire suspected that something was coming. Silas was studying the toe of his boot with exaggerated interest. Finally he asked, in what he intended to be a careless sort of way:

"It's her father, ain't it, that Ben's workin' for?"

"He is one of the firm, I b'lieve," said the Squire. "Why?"

"Oh, nuthin' particular. Only, William, I'm afeered I've got to tell ye somethin'."

The Squire grunted "Um! Somethin' unpleasant, I s'pose?"

"Yes, I'm afeered so, William," admitted Silas.

"Well, I'm glad o' that," said the Squire. "I've had so much good news lately, that I'll be glad to git a little bad, jest fer a change!"

"I guess I ought ter told ye before, too!" said Silas. "But, somehow, I hated to."

"Oh, that's all right," said the Squire cheerfully. "It's never too late fer bad news. Go ahead!"

Silas thought a moment, then asked: "William, how much wages is Ben gittin' down there to New York?"

In an instant the Squire's hat went down over his eyes. Silas was getting near the danger line. Through his half-closed lids, he looked sharply at Silas.

"Why? What's Ben's wages got to do with your bad news?"

"I don't know — yet," said Silas.

The Squire thought a moment, then he said: "He's gittin' twenty-five dollars a week, an' a share o' the profits."

"Thought he wuz gittin' only eighteen!" replied Silas.

"He was, but he got a raise the fu'st of January. What has Ben's wages got to do with this trouble o' yourn?"

Silas sat meditating for a moment and then, without answering the Squire's question, he said:

"William, do you remember endorsin' a check fer Ben along about a year ago?"

"Yes, sir!" answered the Squire firmly.

"How much was it fer?" said Silas.

"Two hundred an' fifty dollars," answered the Squire.

"Are ye sure about that, William?" asked Silas.

The Squire sniffed contemptuously.

"Well, I am not in the habit uv endorsin' checks without seein' how much they're fer. Why? Ain't I good fer two hundred an' fifty dollars?"

"Yes," said Silas dryly, "jest about that."

The Squire waited a moment, then as Silas remained silent, asked, "Is this — er — trouble ye wuz speakin' about got anythin' to do with that check?"

Silas considered a moment, then slowly nodded his head.

"Why?" demanded the Squire, "you got that money, didn't ye?"

Silas nodded again, as he said: "Ye don't s'pose I'd kept still all this time, if I hadn't, do ye?"

"Then what's the matter with ye?" said the Squire impatiently. "Where does all this trouble you're tellin' 'bout come in? What's the matter with ye, anyhow?"

"Oh, I dunno," said Silas carelessly.

"Well, ye want to find out," replied the Squire. "I hain't in the habit of havin' people hintin' 'round about checks, with my name on 'em, that way. So if ye've got anything to say ag'in the check, you go on. What wuz the matter with it?"

"Oh, nuthin'," said Silas meaningly. "Only when that check got to me, it wuz fer twenty-two hundred an' fifty dollars, that's all!"

For a moment the Squire sat motionless. Then his shoulders went back. Now he had something to fight! He had something definite! And it concerned one of his boys. He took a long pull on the

cigar, carefully placed it on the edge of the table, blew out the smoke in a long, thin film, shoved his hands deep into his trousers pockets, and looked at Silas sharply.

"It wuz fer — what?" he asked in a low tone of voice.

"I said that the check which you endorsed for two hundred and fifty dollars wuz cashed fer *twenty-two* hundred an' fifty dollars! That's all."

The Squire got up and glanced out of the window to see that there were no listeners. Then he came to the end of the table, just back of Silas, and stood looking down at him for a moment. In a low voice, he said:

"What do you mean by that?"

Silas turned and looked at him angrily. "Ye know what I mean, well enough! Here's this nephew o' yourn, that you are always blowin' about, who's been gittin' eighteen dollars a week fer a couple o' years, draws a check for two hundred and fifty dollars, gits you to endorse it, then comes to me privately and asks me to cash it fer a friend o' his, not mentioning how much it is for, an' askin' me to say nuthin' about it. Then, inside o' half an hour, a race track-lookin' feller that I never see before, comes to my store with this check fer *twenty-two* hundred and fifty dollars, signed by your nephew, an' endorsed by you, an' I cash it fer 'im,

as a favor to you an' yer nephew 'cause yer nephew sez it is all right."

The Squire stood looking at him intently a moment, and then asked: "An' didn't ye know this feller that cashed it?"

"No, sir!" answered Silas. "Never see him in my life!"

"Did Ben tell ye how much the check wuz fer, when he asked ye to cash it?" asked the Squire.

"No, sir!"

"Then how do ye know that this strange feller didn't do somethin' to it after he got it?" the Squire asked.

"'Cause the check wuz made out in purple ink, an' the only purple ink I ever see wuz the ink Ben had in that pocket pen o' his. He said it was a kind of ink they used in their office down to New York for drawin' plans or su'thin'. Oh! that check wuz made out with one pen an' with one ink an' by one man."

The Squire put his hand to his mouth to remove his cigar, but there was no cigar there. Absent-mindedly he felt in each upper pocket of his vest for a new one, but found none. He glanced over on the opposite side of the table, where the half-consumed cigar lay, started to reach for it, changed his mind, straightened up, looked at Silas a second, then, in a voice which trembled, in spite of himself, said:

"Silas Dalby, what's yer accusation?"

Silas turned with a snarl. "Jest this. I mean that it looks a good deal to me as if this nephew o' your'n wuz a check-raiser an' a thief!"

The Squire made just one move. His long, sinewy arm shot out and the next instant Silas lay doubled back across the table, with the Squire's hand clinching his throat. Silas was gasping and trying, with both hands, to tear the Squire's hand away. Silas' puny strength was nothing against that one-handed grip of the Squire's. He ceased to struggle and lay there looking up, white with fear. Then in a voice of suppressed emotion the Squire spoke. His voice was scarcely above a whisper, but every word cut the air like a knife.

"Silas Dalby, you and I have been friends and neighbors for more'n sixty years an' never had a word between us, but ef ye ever say one word ag'in either of them boys agin — I'll kill ye. Do ye hear? I'll kill ye!"

He picked him up as if he were a feather, and tossed him into a chair, as he continued:

"Now you listen to me. You have had yer say. I let ye say it all, to the bitter end. Now I'll tell ye somethin'! Ben Gould wuz born and raised right here in this town. You have known him since he wuz born. An' you know, as well as I do, that he never done a dishonest thing in his life! If he

drew that check an' asked you to cash it — it is all right. It ain't any uv my bizness — it ain't any uv your bizness — whether it wuz fer two hundred an' fifty dollars or two million and fifty, as long as he had the funds to meet it. I thought it wuz fer two hundred an' fifty, but I wuz prob'ly mistaken. But, whatever it wuz fer, it was all right. Ben is twenty-five years old an' this is the fu'st time anybody has ever dared to say anything ag'in him, an' it wants to be the last! So now, you mark what I say, an' remember it. If I ever know uv your sayin' another word ag'in either o' them boys, I'll bust ye, as sure as there is a God in Heaven. An' now you git out o' here, an' remember what I tell ye! ”

Silas tried to say something, but the Squire broke in.

“For God's sake, go! That scrawny neck o' yours looks altogether too temptin'. Go!”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE next two months were the hardest the Squire had ever known. It was his first real quarrel. There had of course been disputes, arguments and loss of temper between himself and others, and during the election campaigns, there had been the usual recriminations and threats, of all sorts, but these things had all been straightened out in the course of a day or two. If the other fellow did not come around and apologize, the Squire did, irrespective of where the fault lay.

But this quarrel with Silas had gone deeper. If he had accused the Squire of anything short of murder, the Squire would have overlooked it, and made it up. But this accusation against one of his boys was different. When they met, which was as seldom as the Squire could make it, they simply scowled and passed by, without a word.

Of course, such an unheard-of condition of affairs, between the leading citizens of the town, aroused curiosity to a high pitch. But no one could get the faintest inkling of the cause. Silas didn't dare to tell and the Squire had turned in such a frightful rage on the first man that dared to men-

tion it to him, that no one ventured to repeat the experiment.

What made it doubly hard for the Squire, was that he could do nothing. He had heard nothing from Ben since he had gone out West. He did not know where he was. There was nothing for him to do but wait, and the Squire was a bad waiter. Along toward the last of November, Mrs. Bill Silver's prognostications had been fulfilled, and "The Third Assistant Dook of Austria" incognito, was now an honored guest at her house. The Squire had satisfied the general public, by speaking of Mrs. Gordon, letting them infer that Kate had married a man of the same name as her own.

The fact that the first two-thirds of "The Dook's" name was William Tappan, tickled the Squire so much that the last third, as a matter of mystery to him, did not trouble him deeply.

In the early spring Kate with the little "Dook" had come over for a chat with Pauline and Betsy.

Dannie entered the room mysteriously and tip-toed to the Squire:

"The train is in," he said.

"Well, what of it?" said the Squire.

"There wuz two fellers come on it!" whispered Dannie.

"Well, what of it?" repeated the Squire, "that's what the train is for, ain't it?"

"Yes, sir, but they asked, fu'st thing, how you wuz."

The Squire started and glanced at Pauline, then said sharply to Dannie:

"What kind of lookin' fellers?"

Dannie squirmed around on his heel, trying to look innocent, but in reality looking wise.

"Did they look anything like me?" demanded the Squire.

"Oh, no, sir!" said Dannie earnestly, "they're real, nice-lookin' fellers."

Pauline came up to the Squire and laid her hand on his arm. "You don't — think it is —" and she stopped.

The Squire led Pauline out into the hall, patting her gently on the back. Then he put his arm around her and said: "Now don't you get excited. Everything will be all right."

At that instant the door was burst open and Ben came in, stopped, surprised at the attitude of the Squire and then recovering himself quickly, said: "I found him, Uncle Bill, I found him."

The Squire grasped both of Ben's hands and shook them, exclaiming: "Gol blamed if I hain't found *you*. Where in thunder have you been and why in thunder didn't you write?"

"There was no news to write at first," said Ben, "and after that there was no time."

At this instant, another figure darkened the doorway and then rushed toward the Squire.

"I told you I'd come back some day and come back right, Uncle," said the newcomer.

"I don't care how you come, as long as you come," said the Squire. "Now come right in here, both of you, and let me look at ye."

At this instant Will caught sight of Pauline standing with her hands against her breast, leaning forward and trembling.

"Polly!" he cried. "Polly! It isn't you!" In another instant she was folded close in his arms, while Ben and the Squire discreetly indulged in some quiet conversation aside. After a bit, Ben called to his brother, saying:

"When you get plenty of time, Will, I should like to be introduced to this young lady. You know she might want to thank me for bringing you back."

"By Jove," exclaimed Will, "that is so; Pauline, my brother Ben."

Ben went over to Pauline and looked down into her smiling face. "For the past three weeks," he said, "it has been Polly did this and Polly said that, so I feel that I know you already."

The Squire said, smiling: "I guess I can see where I have to get a new school teacher."

"Why, Uncle?" asked Ben.

"Why, because Bill Biffins' Baby is our school

teacher and the best one we ever had, too," replied the Squire. "An' Bill Biffins' Baby ain't the only one around here, at the present time. There's one asleep in your old cradle this minute."

At this moment, Betsy entered from the kitchen and was seized by the two boys. After their greetings were over, the Squire turned to Ben and said:

"I guess there is somebody else up here that you will be glad to see, too."

Ben asked carelessly: "Who is it, Uncle Bill?"

"Well," said the Squire, "it is some one that I thought you was goin' to mean more to than you do."

"What do you mean?" said Ben, in a half whisper, "not Kate?"

"Well," said the Squire dryly, "is she the only one?"

"She's the only woman I ever loved," said Ben quietly.

The Squire started and looked at Ben sternly.

"She is? Then you want to stop it right now!" said the Squire.

"Why?" asked Ben.

"Because she is married and you know it," said the Squire.

"I know it?" said Ben in surprise.

"Yes!" said the Squire, "but there's another thing you don't know."

"What is that?" asked Ben.

"She has got the cutest little baby you ever see in your life! An' his first name is William Tappan!" said the Squire triumphantly.

Ben started back with a gasp.

"A baby?"

He studied a moment, and then, looking up at the Squire in a frightened sort of way, asked:

"And what — what does she say of her husband?"

"She hain't said nuthin' 'bout him to anybody but me, an' what she told me wuz in a bizness way."

"Did she —" and Ben swallowed hard, "did she say who her husband was?"

"No," replied the Squire.

Ben left the Squire; went to Will and took him by the arm. "Excuse me just a minute!" he said to Pauline; then dragged Will to one side.

"Will, Kate is up here. There is a baby! For God's sake come and tell them everything now. I can't stand it any longer."

"Why, my dear boy," said Will, "I will tell them just as soon as we can get them together."

"Where is Kate?" asked Ben.

The Squire looked at Ben in surprise.

"Where is who?" he asked.

"Where is my wife?" demanded Ben.

The Squire stood looking at him, as if he thought he had lost his mind.

"Your what?"

"My wife! Kate! Where is she?"

The Squire looked at him another instant before he replied:

"Say, your mind hain't give way, has it?" he asked anxiously.

"No, but it will, if this keeps up much longer," answered Ben, and he started to pass the Squire. The Squire stopped him.

"Here, wait a minute," he said. "Do you mean to say that you are this gal's husband?"

"Yes, I do mean just that. We have been married over a year," cried Ben, crowding by the Squire.

The door to the next room opened wider and Ben caught sight of Kate bending over her baby. He rushed toward her with a glad cry, his arms outstretched. The others followed wonderingly.

"Kate! I have come back. I had to go. Listen to me."

He stopped and his arms fell to his side. Kate had not even looked up. She bent further over her baby. Silas Dalby came in at the door, and went over to the Squire, but nobody noticed him. Ben stood as if turned to stone. The Squire took a step forward and looked from Ben to Kate. After a pause he said:

"Your — wife seems pooty glad to see ye, don't she?"

The sound of his voice seemed to awaken Ben. He stepped nearer to Kate.

"Good God! Kate, you can't mean this! You can't mean to treat your husband this way!"

Kate only bent lower over the baby, then slowly lifted her head, and looking him straight in the eyes, said in a low, tense voice:

"My baby is honest and true, even if his father is not!"

Silas Dalby sprang forward.

"There! What did I tell ye? He is —"

The Squire turned on him like a flash, and shook his fist in his face.

"Shet up, or I'll knock yer head off!" he cried.

Silas stepped back. The Squire turned toward Kate and stood looking down at her a moment. Then he spoke:

"See here," he said, "when you come to me lookin' fer a divorce, you said your husband wuz a thief, didn't ye?"

There was no answer. Kate only bent over her child.

"Answer me! Ain't that what ye said?" demanded the Squire.

Barely above a whisper came the answer: "Yes."

"An' this boy here is your husband?"

Again the whispered: "Yes."

The Squire stood looking down at her for a moment. His face worked, and his hands were clinched. Ben laid a hand on his shoulder, but he shook it off. Then he spoke to the girl.

"Miss, you're a woman — and a mother, settin' there with your baby in your lap, an' you *should* be a good woman."

He paused a moment, and then added:

"But you lied!"

Ben stepped forward and grasped the Squire's arm.

"Uncle, don't!" he cried.

The Squire paid no attention to him. He still stood steadily regarding Kate. Will stepped down between Kate and the Squire, saying:

"Now, this thing has gone far enough."

The Squire pushed him back, out of the way, as he had pushed Ben.

"No, it ain't gone far enough, nuther. It's goin' through now. It's goin' to be straightened out, right now!"

"I know it," said Will, "and I am the only one that can straighten it out."

The Squire looked at him in surprise.

"You are? What have you got to do with it?"

"You sit down there, and I'll tell you all about

it," said Will, getting a chair and placing it for the Squire.

"No, I won't set down, nuther!" said the Squire belligerently. "I'll stand up, an' you go on with what you've got to say."

There was a breathless pause for a moment, and then Will went on. "Uncle Bill, you never knew, did you, that I was up here a year ago last summer?"

"No," said the Squire, "I didn't."

"Well," Will went on, "I was. I wanted to see Ben. I — I needed some money."

Pauline had been listening breathlessly to all this. She did not know what it was all about, but she had heard enough to know there was trouble in store for somebody. When she heard that Will had been there for money, secretly, a sickening dread came over her. She stepped to his side and laid her hand upon his arm, as if to check any revelation.

Will turned to her with a smile and patted the hand on his arm.

"It's all right, little girl! It's all right!" Then, turning to the Squire, he went on: "This was just about the time I got hold of my mine."

"What mine?" demanded the Squire.

"Why, my mine at Leadville, Colorado," said Will.

"Oh, yes, I b'lieve I did hear something about a mine," said the Squire.

"Well," continued Will, "I needed money to work the mine. I knew Ben had a little money saved up and I knew he was here, so I came up to see if I couldn't sell him some stock in the mine."

"Well?" said the Squire.

"And," Will continued, "I did."

"Did what?" asked the Squire.

"I sold Ben ten shares in my mine for two hundred and fifty dollars. In payment he gave me a check, indorsed by you."

Silas Dalby darted forward. "Fer how much?" he demanded.

The Squire shoved Will aside and stepped over between him and Silas.

"Jest let me git over nearer to this critter!" he said, looking at Silas threateningly. "Now, go ahead, Will."

"Well," said Will, "as I didn't want anyone to know that I was up here, Ben made this check out payable to 'bearer' so that my partner could cash it instead of my doing so."

"So who could cash it?" asked the Squire.

"My partner," said Will. "And Mr. Dalby cashed it, I believe. Didn't you, Mr. Dalby?" turning to Silas.

"I did," said Silas emphatically.

"Yes," said Will with a smile, "I thought you did. With this money, we went out to Leadville and opened our mine. Of course it was pretty discouraging work at first. Everybody laughed at us and tried to discourage us. You see, we were out beyond everybody else. There never had been any gold found there and nobody expected there ever would be. But I kept pegging away at it, going deeper and deeper. I expected every day that our money would give out, but the way it lasted was wonderful. I never saw two hundred and fifty dollars last the way that did."

Silas grunted. Will laughed and continued, "Anyway the money lasted until, one day, we surprised everybody in general, and ourselves particularly, by striking it!"

"Striking what?" demanded the Squire.

"Gold!" said Will.

"Gold?" said the Squire surprised. "I didn't s'pose they ever found gold in gold mines. None of 'em did that I bought!"

Will laughed. "Well, Uncle, we found it. And inside of a month we were taking out five hundred a week."

"Five hundred what?" asked the Squire.

"Dollars!" said Will.

"Well, see here," said the Squire, "of course,

I'm glad you struck your gold; but what I want to know about, jest now, is that check."

"I am coming to that now," said Will. "You know I told you that my partner cashed that check."

"Yes, yes," said the Squire impatiently.

"This partner of mine was a very peculiar sort of a chap. He was not much of an ornament to society and I don't suppose he could be held up as a pattern for the young, but he certainly stuck to me. In fact, his devotion to me cost poor Jim his life. About a month ago we were working in the mine, when a brace over our heads broke. I didn't see it, but Jim did and he sprang forward to push me out of danger. He saved me, but the falling rock caught him and crushed him so badly that he died that night. But before he died he told me how it was that the two hundred and fifty dollars had lasted so long. It seemed that when Ben made out that check, he used his fountain pen, which was filled with a purple ink that they use in the office in New York. After he had finished, he left the pen lying on that table by your office, Uncle Bill, while he went after you to indorse the check. After I had gone, Jim concluded that two hundred and fifty dollars was not enough capital to start in the mining business, so he took the pen that Ben had used in making out the check and wrote the figure two in front of two fifty, and the word twenty in front of the words two hun-

dred and fifty, and Mr. Dalby cashed the check for twenty-two hundred and fifty. I only learned this a month ago, and I was on my way here to square it when Ben found me."

Ben could stand it no longer and came over to Kate, exclaiming: "There! Now, Kate, will you —"

But the Squire pushed him back again, exclaiming: "Hold on! Wait a minute!"

"What's the matter now?" asked Ben impatiently.

The Squire paid no attention to him, but said to Will: "You say you didn't know anything about this till a month ago?"

"No," said Will.

The Squire turned to Silas. "An' you got your money over a year ago?"

"Ye-us," answered Silas grudgingly.

The Squire looked at the others. "Then who paid that other two thousand dollars to the bank?"

Kate laid the baby in Betsy's arms, and started to rise, saying: "Oh, Mr. Tappan, I —"

"Set down!" thundered the Squire.

"Uncle! Don't!" said Ben pleadingly.

The Squire paid no attention to Ben, but stood looking sternly at Kate. "You had your chance to stick to him, as I told ye, ye ought to — an' ye didn't do it! Now — I'll attend to this!"

Looking around to the others again, he repeated: "Who paid that other two thousand dollars to the bank?"

Kate sprang to her feet and faced the angry Squire, without a tremor, as she said: "I will tell you who paid that money back to the bank. Ben Gould has been paying it back out of his salary, to protect his brother! I overheard, at the bank, that he was paying back money obtained on a raised check. I thought he had raised the check himself. When I accused him of it he would not defend himself. He allowed me to think it was he. Can't you see? Don't you see? He thought his brother had done this, and rather than betray him he kept silence when he should have spoken. Oh, Ben, Ben! Can you ever forgive me?" Kate rushed into Ben's arms.

Like a flash, the Squire turned on Silas and shook his finger in his face: "There! You popple-headed, old gander! You will call my boy a thief, will ye?" But the next minute his arm was around Silas, and their hands were clasped, as he went on: "But I don't keer. Ye let 'em have the money!"

Betsy came over to Ben and laid the baby in his arms. He held it gingerly as if it were a delicate specimen of glassware. He examined every feature closely. The others stood watching him. He held it out carefully at arms' length and examined it critically.

"What's his name?" he demanded.

"William!" said the Squire triumphantly.

"Well, William," said Ben, "you're a peach! Isn't he, Uncle Bill?"

"Yes," said the Squire with a sigh, "I guess he's a peach all right. But you have certainly busted thunder out of the Third Assistant Dook of Austria. Has he made sufficient impression on his father?"

"Here! What's wrong here?" demanded Ben. "What did I do to him?" The baby had begun to cry.

"Oh, let me take him," said Kate, laughing.

"He doesn't know you yet."

"What?" said Ben, "don't know me? Don't know his own father? How have you folks been bringing up my son anyhow?"

"Well," said the Squire with a grin, "I guess we hain't brought him up so fer in any direction that his character is sot yet. I guess ye kin reform him if you devote yerself to it."

"Well," said Ben with an exaggerated sigh, "I'll try it, but it looks like a pretty tough proposition to me." Then turning and taking Kate's arm he drew her away. "Come on, Kate! Let's go over in the corner and explain the matter to him!"

"Well, here. Wait a minute," said Will.

Kate and Ben stopped and all looked at him expectantly.

"I want to tell you folks about this mine," said Will.

"Oh, don't bother me about your mine!" said Ben, "I've got mine right here."

"Well, you are a fine stockholder," said Will.

"This means more to me than stocks," said Ben as he held out his arms for Kate to lay the baby in them again.

"The father of that baby is richer than you all think," said Will. "Shares in the Plunger Gold Mine are quoted at two thousand dollars."

"Quoted at what?" cried the Squire, whirling round and facing him.

"Two thousand dollars," answered Will with a smile.

"And do you mean to say that those ten shares that Ben bought of you are worth—" The Squire stopped.

"Yes, sir!" said Will. "The ten shares are worth to-day exactly twenty thousand dollars. There is also twelve thousand six hundred dollars due in unpaid dividends, for which I stand ready to give a check."

The Squire thought a minute, then looked at Will. "I bet ye I bought some of that stock at some time or other," he said.

Will laughed. "I guess not, Uncle."

"Ye sure?" asked the Squire.

"Sure!" said Will.

The Squire sighed. "That's kinder funny," he said. "I thought I had bought stock in every gold mine in America."

"So did I," said Betsy dryly.

"But you missed this one," said Will, "for I know where every share is. But then, you must remember, I did have a partner in this."

"What become uv his share o' the mine?" said the Squire.

"I don't know yet," said Will. "That is partly what I am up here to find out."

"Why, what are ye goin' to find out 'round here?" asked the Squire.

"I'll tell you," said Will. "Jim was a fellow that never had much to say about his past; in fact, he never said anything about it. But before he died he told me that he had left a wife and family up here in New England. He asked me to come back and try to find them and turn over his share of the property to them."

"What did ye say his name wuz?" asked the Squire.

"I did not say," replied Will.

"Well, what was it?" asked the Squire impatiently.

"Before I answer that," said Will, "I want to have you folks look at this picture." He held out a faded photograph. "It was Jim's wife. See if you know her."

The Squire took it, scrutinized it carefully and shook his head. "No," he said, "'tain't anybody I know."

He handed it to Betsy and she peered at it carefully.

"No," said Betsy, "it ain't anybody I ever see, I guess. Looks kinder familiar, too."

She held it out toward the Squire. He was just about to take it, when Nannie, who, with childish curiosity, had been trying to get a look at it, succeeded. The next moment she snatched it away from the Squire, looked at it an instant, and then cried out, "Why, that's my mamma!"

"Your what?" exclaimed the Squire, as he took the picture from her and looked at it again.

"I guess the little girl is right, Uncle," said Will. "For my partner was James V. Needham and he left his wife and child at Northfield, Vermont, where Ben says this little lady came from. I began to suspect who she was the minute Ben mentioned her name.

"And so, Jim's little girl and I are, with the exception of Ben's ten shares, sole and equal owners

of the Plunger Gold Mine of Leadville, Colorado, U. S. A."

There was silence for a moment and then the Squire said: "There! There goes another of 'em. I've lost the Dook of Austria, I've lost Bill Biffins' Baby and I've lost my little Nannie, but — thank the Lord! I've got Dannie left."

Tom Flinders came in just at this point with an express package. Following him was a goodly portion of Bradford's population. There was a hurried whispering. The young people rushed out of the room. There was a rustling of papers and then they returned, Pauline holding a suspicious looking box.

"Uncle Bill," said Ben, "the village school-ma'am is about to make a speech!"

The Squire turned and found himself in the center of a group of friends and neighbors who had followed the express package.

"What's this? None o' your jokes!" he said.

Pauline's voice trembled as she began to speak. "Mr. Tappan," she said, "ever since the night I walked into your office, uninvited and a stranger, and you opened your big heart and took me into it, I have wanted to show you, in some way, how much I appreciated your kindness."

"Oh, you git out!" said the Squire, embarrassed.

"Order! Order!" cried Ben.

was in sight. He listened. From afar, the sleigh bells of some belated party, came trembling on the air. No lights were visible along the village street. Only the red and green lights at the station shone out, telling that the track was clear for the midnight freight.

He opened his office door and sat down in his old armchair. Lovingly he looked at the clarinet, as it lay across his knees. The mother of pearl ornaments caught the moonbeams and threw them back in a thousand scintillating gleams of light. Softly and tenderly he laid his fingers on the keys. Every finger fell into its proper place. The years of practice on broomsticks and hoe-handles had not been in vain.

Again he listened. Silence. He slipped his hand along the book shelf and took down the companion of so many years: "The Beginner's Clarinet Book."

The town clock, in the tower, boomed out the hour of midnight. He placed the mouthpiece to his lips, moistened the reed and gently blew. Then he took the instrument away and wiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

Once more his fingers fell upon the keys and sitting there, alone, at midnight, a pæan of thanksgiving went up to God, as the old man poured out his soul in the strains of: "Shall We Gather at the River?"

THE END

for it. Somethin' always happened, jest when it seemed nearest. When I wuz a young man, I used to think that perhaps I would have one, some day. But, late years, I begun to think perhaps the good Lord didn't think it wuz for the best. And now — I — you." The Squire winked furiously for a moment and then blurted out: "Say, you come 'round in a week or so and I'll play it to you! I can't say it."

Everybody crowded around the Squire to admire the instrument and congratulate him.

"Ain't it awful pretty, Uncle Mister Tappan?" piped in Nannie with delight. "Ain't it, Aunt Betsy?"

"Ye-us," admitted Aunt Betsy, "pooty enough, but they do make a turr'ble noise."

The Squire, unconsciously fondled the instrument, looking it over much as a young mother gazes at her firstborn. Had he been questioned, he would probably have confessed to a desire to be alone with it. Possibly this feeling had a silent effect upon the neighbors, for, one by one and two by two they went their various ways.

And when, at last, he was alone with the idol of his dreams, he wondered if he might not try it, just once, even though the hour was late. He looked out of the window, then tiptoed out into the yard and looked up and down the roadway. Not a soul

